

Heretics, Dissidents, and Society

Narrating the Trial of John bar 'Abdun

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In the 1020s, communities of Syriac-speaking Miaphysite Christians were thriving under Byzantine rule in and around the Anatolian city of Melitene (modern-day Malatya, Turkey). The Byzantine Chalcedonian bishop of Melitene at the time, one John, appealed to Constantinople on multiple occasions to side with him against the Syrian Miaphysites in his diocese.¹ In November of 1028, Romanos Argyros acceded to the Byzantine throne, and in a matter of weeks he

responded to John of Melitene's plea: Messengers from Constantinople arrived to the local Byzantine governor, the *krites* of Melitene, in 1028 "after Christmas," with the order to arrest the venerable Jacobite patriarch John VIII bar 'Abdun, who had occupied his see since 1004, and to send him to the capital.² The *krites* claimed not to know where the patriarch was and secretly sought to warn him, but someone betrayed the patriarch and told the messengers that they could find him at the Monastery of Bārid, where the patriarch resided, several days away from Melitene.³ And so the Jacobite patriarch was arrested and brought, with six of his bishops and twenty priest-monks, first to Melitene and, after wintering there, onward to the capital city.⁴ They arrived during the full

1 Syrian Miaphysites were often called Jacobites by contemporaries and are frequently known today as the Syrian Orthodox. I use the term "Jacobites" because I prefer to avoid referring to specific confessions as "Orthodox," and because "Jacobites" was used as a standard, non-derogatory term by fellow Miaphysites; e.g., see below, nn. 40, 119; and A. Hilken, *The Anonymous Syriac Chronicle of 1234 and Its Sources*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 272 (Leuven, 2018), 18. As for the term "Melkite," often used in modern scholarship to refer to premodern Arabic-speaking (and sometimes Syriac-speaking) Chalcedonian Christians, I generally avoid it, for two reasons. First, because the Arabic term on which it is based, *malakī* (literally meaning "royal" or "imperial"), refers, in confessional contexts, to any Chalcedonian Christian in communion with the "imperial" (i.e., Roman/Byzantine) church, including speakers of Greek; e.g., see below, nn. 94, 118, 165. Secondly, in modern parlance the term "Melkite" often refers, confusingly, to an eastern rite of the Roman Catholic Church. For these and similar terminological issues, see J. Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East: Religion, Society, and Simple Believers* (Princeton, 2018), 13, n. 9; A. M. Roberts, *Reason and Revelation in Byzantine Antioch: The Christian Translation Program of Abdallah ibn al-Fadl*, Berkeley Series in Postclassical Islamic Scholarship 3 (Oakland, 2020), 8, n. 8, 22–23, 102. For the term "Melkite" in particular, see S. H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton, 2008), 139.

2 *Chronicle of 1234*, ed. Chabot, 2:283, lines 17–18, trans. Abouna, 213: *bātar i'dā d-yaldā* = J.-B. Chabot, ed., *Chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens*, 2 vols., CSCO 81–82 (Paris, 1916–20; Louvain, 1952–53); idem, trans., *Chronicon anonymum ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens*, vol. 1, CSCO 109 (Louvain, 1937), and A. Abouna, trans., *Anonymi auctoris Chronicon ad A.C. 1234 pertinens*, vol. 2, CSCO 354 (Louvain, 1974). Cited by B. A. Vest, *Geschichte der Stadt Melitene und der umliegenden Gebiete: Vom Vorabend der arabischen bis zum Abschluss der türkischen Eroberung (um 600–1124)*, 3 vols., continuous pagination (Hamburg, 2007), 1202. On the office of *krites*, see N. Oikonomides, "L'évolution de l'organisation administrative de l'empire byzantin au XI^e siècle (1025–1118)," *TM* 6 (1976): 125–52, at 148.

3 On the monastery, see G. Dagron, "Minorités ethniques et religieuses dans l'Orient byzantin à la fin du X^e et au XI^e siècle: L'immigration syrienne," *TM* 6 (1976): 177–216, at 190–91.

4 MichSyr 3:140–41, 4:562–63, Ibrahim 565–66 (for these abbreviations, see below, n. 29); Dagron, "Minorités," 201.

moon of June 1029 to a city replete with bishops, all there to celebrate the new emperor's coronation.⁵ A trial took place before the synod, and the Jacobite patriarch was condemned to exile in Thrace, at a monastery on the holy mountain of Ganos by the Sea of Marmora,⁶ where he died about two years later. Three of his bishops yielded to demands to accept the Council of Chalcedon, while three others refused, like the patriarch, and were thrown into prison.⁷

This story is relatively well documented, making such a consensus narrative possible, itself based largely on the most detailed account, preserved in the *Chronicle* of Michael the Syrian (d. 1199), a Jacobite patriarch sympathetic to his predecessor John bar 'Abdun. This and the other surviving accounts have been carefully studied by a number of scholars, who have collated these accounts to establish a plausible reconstruction of events.⁸

How to interpret these events has been more problematic. Scholars have tended to ascribe agency to the Byzantine authorities, framing the events as a shift toward a Byzantine policy of persecuting Syrian Miaphysites, and asking what these events reveal about broader changes in Byzantine imperial policy and the causes of the momentous Byzantine defeat at the

Battle of Manzikert in 1071.⁹ This partly reflects the message of Miaphysite historiography written in the aftermath of 1071, which tends to replace a nuanced and complex portrait of the Byzantine church, state, and their representatives with a straightforward negative picture of ruthless, heretical incompetence.¹⁰

The most influential modern account has been that of Gilbert Dagron. In a 1976 article Dagron interpreted the Jacobite patriarch's arrest after years of peaceful existence within the Byzantine Empire as a sign that the Byzantine imperial government and the patriarch of Constantinople were turning from a "pragmatic" to a "rigorist" attitude with respect to non-Greek, non-Chalcedonian communities within the empire. This, Dagron argued, was a decisive moment in which Byzantium turned in on itself and its own solipsistic

5 MichSyr 3:141, 4:563, Ibrahim 566; Dagron, "Minorités," 201.

6 This is one of the earliest mentions of a monastery at Mount Ganos; see J. Darrouzès, "Le mouvement des fondations monastiques au XI^e siècle," *TM* 6 (1976): 159–76, at 164. Mount Ganos seems already to have been a federation of monasteries like Mount Athos in the tenth century, as it certainly would be in the future (A.-M. Talbot, "Ganos, Mount," *ODB* 2:822), to judge from a seal for the *protos* of Mount Ganos (suggesting he held authority over multiple communities); A. Külzer, "Das Ganos-Gebirge in Ostthrakien (Işıklar Dağı)," in *Heilige Berge und Wüsten: Byzanz und sein Umfeld*, ed. P. Soustal (Vienna, 2009), 41–52, at 42; cited by Z. Chitwood, "The Patriarch Alexios Stoudites and the Reinterpretation of Justinianic Legislation against Heretics," *GRBS* 54.2 (2014): 293–312, at 299, n. 17.

7 MichSyr 3:141–45, 4:563–65, Ibrahim 566–68; Dagron, "Minorités," 201–2.

8 Dagron, "Minorités," 200–204; T. H. Benner, "Die syrisch-jakobitische Kirche unter byzantinischer Herrschaft im 10. und 11. Jahrhundert" (PhD diss., Philipps-Universität zu Marburg, 1989), 80–89 = §8.1; Vest, *Geschichte*, 1171–223 = §4.6–7; D. N. Gyllenhaal, "Byzantine Melitene and the Social Milieu of the Syriac Renaissance," *DOP* 75 (2021): 205–35, esp. 219–30 (hereafter "Byzantine Melitene"). I am grateful to David Gyllenhaal for sharing his article with me prior to publication.

9 G. S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca orientalis Clementino-vaticana* (Rome, 1719–28), 2:150, ¶2 (*suscitatum adversus Joannem Abdun ab Episcopo Melitenensi Melchita persecutionem*, based on the testimony of Michael of Tanis); S. Vryonis Jr., "Byzantium: The Social Basis of Decline in the Eleventh Century," *GRBS* 2.2 (1959): 158–75, at 169; Dagron, "Minorités"; Benner, "Die syrisch-jakobitische Kirche." Zachary Chitwood's insightful work on the legal significance of the synodal condemnation of John bar 'Abdun and other decrees issued under the same patriarch follows Dagron's conclusions with respect to the historical context and meaning of the trial itself; Chitwood, "Patriarch Alexios," esp. 298–300; Z. Chitwood, *Byzantine Legal Culture and the Roman Legal Tradition, 867–1056* (Cambridge, 2017), ch. 5, esp. 139–40. I am grateful to Maria Mavroudi for stressing the agency not only of elite Chalcedonians but also of elite Miaphysites in these events.

10 For this shift in Armenian Miaphysite historiography in particular (from appreciation of Byzantine suzerainty over Armenia and "tolerance" toward the Chalcedonian confession in the tenth century, to the extremely negative portrait of the Byzantine "state, ethos, confession, ideology, [and] personalities" in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries), see V. Arutunova-Fidanjan, "Image of Byzantium in the Armenian World in the X–XII Centuries," in *Byzantium: Identity, Image, Influence. XIX International Congress of Byzantine Studies, University of Copenhagen, 18–24 August, 1996*, vol. 1, *Major Papers*, ed. K. Fledelius, in cooperation with P. Schreiner (Copenhagen, 1996), 74–87, esp. 86. I owe this reference to an anonymous reviewer, who stressed the significance of this historiographical shift. This retrojected negative portrait, and the narrative framing Byzantine imperial policies toward Miaphysites as violent, destructive, and ultimately responsible for Byzantine military collapse, are reflected, for example, in the interpretation advanced by Vryonis, "Byzantium," 169, who saw the trial of John bar 'Abdun as the "renew[al]" of "the persecution of [the Byzantine Empire's] eastern subjects," marking the beginning of state action that incited tensions and "strife," culminating in the total alienation of large parts of the population in the eastern territories, which in turn caused military collapse.

orthodoxy; not simply a deplorable result of ethnic or religious tensions, the trial thus became, for Dagron, a turning point in which Constantinople abandoned a policy of military pragmatism for intolerant persecution, eventually setting the stage for the disastrous Byzantine defeat at the Battle of Manzikert.¹¹

A recent study by David Gyllenhaal has deftly challenged both Dagron's thesis that the trial of John bar 'Abdun represented Byzantium's lurch toward a "rigorism" from which it never returned and the consensus among Syriacists that this and subsequent imperial action led to a decline (in number, prosperity, or otherwise) of the Syrian Miaphysite communities under Byzantine rule. Instead, Gyllenhaal argues, Syrian Miaphysite immigration into Byzantine territory happened gradually in the late tenth century; "imperial policy" regarding Miaphysite communities looks like nothing so much as "the unsteady alternation of benign neglect and sporadic persecution";¹² and, at the trial of the Jacobite patriarch itself, there was significant "disagreement" among Byzantine Chalcedonian churchmen "on the question of toleration for non-Chalcedonian populations," such that the condemnation by the Byzantine synod of bishops in Constantinople must be read not as a unanimous statement on the part of the Byzantine administrative and ecclesiastical elite, but as a contentious argument within this larger debate.¹³

11 Dagron, "Minorités," esp. 200–204. Dagron's work followed upon the heels of G. Dédéyan, "L'immigration arménienne en Cappadoce au XI^e siècle," *Byzantion* 45 (1975): 41–117, on the contemporary Armenian immigration into Cappadocia. Situating the movement of Armenians to Cappadocia in the context of a wider eleventh-century Armenian emigration, Dédéyan argued that Armenia's "reconstitution" in Cappadocia arose from Armenia's own internal disintegration—and that when Byzantine emperors dismantled this community and alienated its members, they left open "the gates of the Byzantine Empire to the Turks"; *ibid.*, 43, 115. Sharing Dédéyan's interest in the movement of people at all levels of society, Dagron focused less on the military consequences and more on the changes in political and religious ideology that the embarrassment of wealthy "heretics" thriving on Byzantine soil brought about; Dagron, "Minorités," 216. Manzikert, mentioned *ibid.*, 212, also hovers over Dagron's earlier observation (p. 204) that "the equilibrium of the areas where the Jacobites had settled was overturned by the Turkish incursions, and the problem of assimilation or rejection was no longer raised (l'équilibre des zones d'implantation jacobite est bouleversé par les incursions turques, et le problème d'une assimilation ou d'un rejet ne se pose plus)."

12 Gyllenhaal, "Byzantine Melitene," 231a.

13 *Ibid.*, 231b–232a.

Taking such an understanding of the events themselves as a starting point, the present article reads our key narrative sources for the trial of John bar 'Abdun as reflecting and constituting competing arguments not only about the Jacobite patriarch's innocence or guilt, but also, more subtly, about the very terms in which these questions should be framed. How do these narratives—preserved in Greek, Syriac, and Arabic, and written by the Byzantine patriarch, Syrian Miaphysite authors, a Coptic Miaphysite author, and an Arabophone Byzantine Chalcedonian author—represent the events, by all accounts pivotal, of 1028–29? What agendas might these narratives advance? And what can these narratives, and the events they variously refract, tell us about the communities—doctrinal, legal, administrative—that these elite authors inhabited and envisioned? I will argue that the ethnic and religious categories mentioned in the narratives did not correspond to fixed social groups, but rather needed to be mobilized and activated, and that this is an important part of what certain historical actors described by the narratives—and the narratives themselves—were seeking to do. More broadly, the unexpected convergences among the narratives, and unexpected strategies within individual narratives, demonstrate that we must rethink how we narrate the history of medieval ecclesiastical disputes, ethnic and religious communities, and Christian attitudes toward orthodoxy and empire.

My approach seeks to bring Rogers Brubaker's perceptive sociological analysis of groups to bear on a premodern multiethnic, multiconfessional society.¹⁴ Brubaker's seminal critique of what he called "common sense groupism" argued, based on observation of twentieth-century ethnic conflict in Eastern Europe, that while ethnic categories are often relatively stable ("ethnicity without groups"), the coherence and boundedness of groups corresponding to these categories ("groupness") is fleeting, usually brought on by violent events or other crises ("groupness as event"), and always sustained primarily by "ethnopolitical entrepreneurs,"

14 R. Brubaker, "Ethnicity without Groups," *European Journal of Sociology / Archives européennes de sociologie* 43.2 (2002): 163–89; repr. in *idem, Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), 7–27. I owe my knowledge of this essay and its potential as a framework for understanding ethnic and religious identity in the medieval Middle East to Michael Cooperson. My approach also takes inspiration from S. Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922–1992* (Berkeley, 1995), knowledge of which I owe to Richard Cándida Smith.

who strive to form or increase the coherence of a social group based on a prioritized category (“group-making as project”). The existence of a group, he argues, is not to be taken for granted and used to explain events, but rather is itself an event that calls for explanation.

Though Brubaker’s focus is modern “ethnic conflicts,” his approach is equally applicable to other times and places (such as medieval Europe and the Mediterranean), and to “religious conflicts.” Much recent work has argued for the complexity of ethnic and religious identity in late antiquity and the middle ages, and for the porousness of supposedly sharp boundaries between ethnic and religious groups.¹⁵ Yet the reification of ethnic and religious *groups* is still typical, and their usefulness as unproblematic analytical entities rarely questioned. Thus, it has been customary to treat the various religious groups of Cappadocia and the rest of the Byzantine reconquered territories as more or less fixed: populations could immigrate and emigrate or convert, but the groups themselves, and their constituting criteria, were static. On the surface this is justifiable, because the theological disputes in the wake of which the various orthodoxies were articulated, and their churches formed, had taken place in what in the tenth century must have seemed like the distant past. And yet we should remember that these clear articulations of doctrine were an elite phenomenon; the extent to which they operated on a social level, in the population at large, must have varied over time and place. Neat social groups corresponding to elite religious categories should not be taken for granted.¹⁶

In the four sections that follow, I will proceed by introducing the authors of four key narratives of the trial of John bar ‘Abdun (“Narrators”) and the narratives’ main protagonists (“Dramatis personae”), before turning to an analysis of the narratives themselves (“Narratives”), and of certain striking convergences (“Convergences”). I conclude by assessing how such an analysis of these

and similar narratives might modify how we interpret the significance of the events they describe.

Narrators

This study will focus on four narrators of the trial of John bar ‘Abdun: Alexios the Stoudite, Michael of Tanis, Yahyā of Antioch, and Michael the Syrian.

1. Alexios the Stoudite was *hegoumenos* (abbot) of the influential Stoudios Monastery in Constantinople when Patriarch Eustathios passed away. Alexios visited the emperor Basil II, himself on his deathbed, with a precious relic, the head of John the Baptist, whereupon the monarch appointed Alexios to succeed Eustathios on Constantinople’s patriarchal throne.¹⁷ Alexios would remain patriarch until his death in 1043.¹⁸

Alexios the Stoudite presided over the trial of John bar ‘Abdun, and wrote or commissioned three synodal documents directly in connection with it.¹⁹ The first, which is the only one to not survive, condemned the Jacobite patriarch in October 1029. The second, from May 1030, confirms the condemnation of John bar ‘Abdun and further proclaims how the capitulating and noncapitulating Jacobite bishops are to be dealt with. The brief third decree, from not long after 1 April 1032, reaffirms the second.²⁰ Here the second decree will be

17 John Skylitzes, *Σύνοψις ἱστοριῶν*, *Basil II and Constantine VIII* [second reign], §47, ed. I. Thurn, *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis historiarum: Editio princeps*, CFHB 5 (Berlin, 1973), 368–69 [= Kedrenos, PG 122:212C]; trans. J. Wortley, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811–1057* (New York, 2010), 348. Psellos reports that Basil II had a close relationship with the prestigious Stoudios Monastery; see J. Leroy and O. Delouis, “Quelques inédits attribués à Antoine III Stoudite,” *REB* 62.1 (2004): 5–81, at 23–24. Basil II died 12 or 15 December 1025. See now Gyllenhaal, “Byzantine Melitene,” 219b.

18 V. Laurent, “La chronologie des patriarches de Constantinople de 996 à 1111,” *EO* 35 (1936): 67–81, at 75–76; A. Kazhdan, “Alexios Stoudites,” *ODB* 1:67.

19 V. Grumel, *Les registres des actes du Patriarcat de Constantinople*, 2nd ed., ed. J. Darrouzès (Paris, 1972–), 1.2–3:344–346 = nos. 838–40.

20 The two extant decrees (nos. 839 and 840) were published by G. Ficker, *Erlasse des Patriarchen von Konstantinopel Alexios Studites* (Kiel, 1911), 8–21, 25–27 = nos. 3–4, on the basis of a single twelfth-century manuscript, Escorial R.I.15 (diktyon 15287; this “diktyon” number refers to the manuscript’s unique identifier in “Pinakes: Textes et manuscrits grecs,” <http://pinakes.irht.cnrs.fr/>), on which, see L. Burgmann et al., *Repertorium der Handschriften des byzantinischen Rechts*, vol. 1, *Die Handschriften des weltlichen Rechts* (Nr. 1–327), *Forschungen zur byzantinischen Rechtsgeschichte* 20 (Frankfurt

15 E.g., W. Pohl and H. Reimitz, eds., *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300–800* (Leiden, 1998); T. Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia, 2009); R. E. Payne, *A State of Mixture: Christians, Zoroastrians, and Iranian Political Culture in Late Antiquity*, *Transformation of the Classical Heritage* 56 (Oakland, 2015).

16 For a fundamental reconsideration of the social consequences of contested theologies beyond a narrow educated elite, see Tannous, *Making*.

the main source for the perspective of “Alexios, by God’s mercy archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome, and ecumenical patriarch.”²¹ Written immediately after the events, it is a crucial witness to the process of justifying official action through narrative.

2. In his biography of the Coptic Miaphysite pope Zacharias (64th patriarch of Alexandria, r. 1004–1032), Michael of Tanis (b. Damrū, Egypt; d. bet. 1051 and 1086), Miaphysite bishop of Tanis in the Nile Delta (Τάνις, Ar. Tinnīs), included an extended excursus on John bar ‘Abdun.²² Michael of Tanis wrote this biography in Coptic ca. 1050, as part of a set of ten biographies covering the fifty-sixth to the sixty-fifth patriarch (880–1046). These biographies only survive in an Arabic translation, included in the collected edition of papal biographies completed in the late eleventh century, *Ṣiyar al-bī’a al-muqaddasah* (Lives of the Holy Church). The excursus, as Michael describes, drew on information that he gathered during his visit to Melitene in 1048–49 to deliver the synodical letter of Pope Christodoulos (66th patriarch of Alexandria, r. 1046–1077) to the Jacobite patriarch John IX (r. 1042?–1057).²³ Based on a statement near the end of his excursus on John bar ‘Abdun, it seems likely that

his main informant in Melitene was a disciple of John bar ‘Abdun.²⁴

3. Yahyā of Antioch was an Arabic-speaking Chalcedonian Christian who, as he himself narrates, settled in Antioch in 1014–15 CE (AH 405) and died after 1034.²⁵ Little is known about his life beyond what he tells us in the preface to his *Dhayl* (Continuation, i.e., of the History of Sa’id b. al-Biṭrīq, a.k.a. Eutychius, Chalcedonian patriarch of Alexandria, d. 940).²⁶ His sources for the period after 1000 are primarily “oral reports, firsthand accounts, [and] archival documents.”²⁷ The text of Yahyā’s *Dhayl* reaches us in six manuscripts (or did—two of them seem to have disappeared in the 1950s).²⁸ Yahyā’s account of John bar ‘Abdun’s trial, quoted in full below, is short but rich.

4. Michael the Syrian (1126–1199), like John bar ‘Abdun himself, was a Jacobite patriarch of Antioch (r. 1166–1199) hailing from Melitene. He wrote a world chronicle in Syriac from Creation to 1195.²⁹ The

am Main, 1995), 60–62 = no. 47, esp. item 48 on p. 62. These decrees were copied (along with many other texts) from the Escorial manuscript into Vat. gr. 1187 (diktyon 67818; 1574 CE at the Escorial); see Burgmann et al., *Repertorium*, 272–76 = no. 244, esp. item 52 on p. 275. For the chronology, see Ficker, *Erlasse*, 24 (1030–38); Grumel, *Regestes*, 1.2–3:346 = no. 840 (April 1032, because, according to Yahyā of Antioch, Patriarch Elias of Antioch was ordained to his see while in Constantinople on 1 April 1032); Dagron, “Minorités,” 202.

21 Ficker, *Erlasse*, 8, lines 1–2: Ἀλέξιος ἐλέω θεοῦ ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Κωνσταντινουπόλεως Νέας Ῥώμης καὶ οἰκουμενικὸς πατριάρχης. See Kazhdan, “Alexios Stoudites.”

22 Severus ibn al-Muqaffa’, *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church*, ed. and trans. Y. ‘Abd al-Masih and O. H. E. Burmester, multiple vols. (Cairo, 1943–), 2.2:139–48, trans. at 211–24 [hereafter *HPEC*, always with reference to vol. 2.2 (1948)]. For the narrative logic of inserting John’s life and miracles into the biography, see M. N. Swanson, “Sainthood Achieved: Coptic Patriarch Zacharias According to *The History of the Patriarchs*,” in *Writing “True Stories”: Historians and Hagiographers in the Late Antique and Medieval Near East*, ed. A. Papaconstantinou (Turnhout, 2010), 219–30.

23 See (with references) M. N. Swanson, “Michael of Damrū,” in *Christian–Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 3, 1050–1200, ed. D. Thomas and A. Mallett (Leiden, 2011), 84–88; cited by Gyllenhaal, “Byzantine Melitene,” 219, n. 77 (for John IX’s dates, 222, n. 93).

24 As argued by Gyllenhaal; see below, n. 32.

25 Yahyā of Antioch, *Histoire de Yahyā ibn Sa’id d’Antioche* [2], ed. I. Kratchkovsky, trans. F. Micheau and G. Troupeau, PO 47.4 (Turnhout, 1997), 5. This is the edition (with translation and annotation of Micheau and Troupeau) of the second of two parts of Yahyā’s text; the first appeared half a century earlier: Yahyā of Antioch, *Histoire de Yahya-ibn-Sa’id d’Antioche continuateur de Sa’id-ibn-Bitriq* [1], ed. and trans. I. Kratchkovsky and A. A. Vasiliev, PO 18.5, 23.3 (Paris, 1924–32). For earlier editions, see Yahyā, *Histoire* [2], 9–11.

26 M. N. Swanson, “Yahyā ibn Sa’id al-Anṭākī,” in *Christian–Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 2, 900–1050, ed. D. Thomas and A. Mallett (Leiden, 2010), 657–61.

27 Yahyā, *Histoire* [2], 8.

28 Ibid., 8–9.

29 J.-B. Chabot, ed. and trans., *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1899–1910), preserved in the Edessa-Aleppo Codex (1598 CE), the unique manuscript containing the chronicle (besides fragments in Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Sachau 81 and New Haven, Yale Beinecke, syr. 7). This manuscript can be consulted in the facsimile by G. Y. Ibrahim, ed., *The Edessa-Aleppo Syriac Codex of the Chronicle of Michael the Great* (vol. 1 of G. A. Kiraz, ed., *Texts and Translations of the Chronicle of Michael the Great*) (Piscataway, NJ, 2009); and now in the online reproduction at <https://www.vhmm.org/readingRoom/view/500917>. The chronicle is cited here as “MichSyr,” referring to Chabot’s translation (in vol. 3), the Syriac transcription (in vol. 4), the page number of Ibrahim’s facsimile edition, and the folio number of the Edessa-Aleppo Codex. (The last two numbers are related to each other linearly, making it relatively simple to convert one to the other: let *F* be the folio number, plus ½ if *verso*, and *I* be Ibrahim’s page number; then $2F = I + 6$. The Syriac transcription in Chabot’s edition does

Chronicle's narrative is based on a range of sources, many reproduced verbatim in accordance with the genre.³⁰ In the case of John bar 'Abdun, Michael the Syrian reproduces a long quotation of a much earlier biography of the Jacobite patriarch.³¹ This biography seems to have been written by a disciple of his, probably the one—also named John (*Īwannī*, a transliteration of the Greek form Ἰωάννης)—whose book of John (*Yūhannān*) bar 'Abdun's miracles is mentioned in Michael's chronicle soon after the end of the excerpt; Gyllenhaal has convincingly argued that this same disciple was probably Michael of Tanis's main source for the events as well.³² Here I will refer to that text as the Disciple's Vita.

In addition I will make occasional reference to the fragmentary account of John bar 'Abdun given in the chronicle, written by a Syrian Miaphysite, that is known to modern scholars as the *Chronicle of 1234*. It appears to be an abbreviated excerpt from the version of the Disciple's Vita found in Michael the Syrian (with some important differences).³³ This chronicle's author was probably a clergyman and must have lived in northern Mesopotamia, perhaps in Edessa, whose history

interested him more than that of Melitene.³⁴ The chronicle survived into the twentieth century in a single damaged manuscript, which is now lost.³⁵

These are not all of the sources that touch upon John bar 'Abdun's trial, but together they form the bulk of our evidence—they will be our narrators.³⁶ These narrators, like the protagonists of their accounts, were all either (Syrian or Coptic) Miaphysites or (Greek- or Arabic-speaking) Chalcedonians. The Jacobites traced themselves back to Jacob Baradaeus (d. 578), bishop of Edessa, who, in part responding to the late Roman (Byzantine) emperor Justinian's attempt to enforce doctrinal unity in the church hierarchy, formed a *separate* church hierarchy in Syria that rejected the Council of Chalcedon (held in 451) and accepted the "one-nature"

not always line up perfectly with the manuscript pages, but there is a rough correspondence that usually holds, namely, $I = C + 3$, where C is the page number of the Syriac transcription.) On the relation of the Syriac text to the Armenian version that survives, see (with references) D. Weltecke, "The World Chronicle by Patriarch Michael the Great (1126–1199): Some Reflections," *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies* 11.2 (1997): 6–30, at 11.

30 The text is generally separated into three columns: on the succession of bishops, the succession of empires, and other events; Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, 1:xxiv (introduction). For the attempt to understand the chronicle of Michael the Syrian on its own terms, and to uncover its internal "logic" and visual aesthetics, see Weltecke, "World Chronicle"; eadem, "Originality and Function of Formal Structures in the Chronicle of Michael the Great," *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 3.2 (2000): 173–203.

31 This part of the chronicle is generally based on a single source, the chronicle of Ignatios of Melitene, a monk, bishop of Melitene from 1061 until his death in 1094, and nephew of the Jacobite patriarch Athanasios IV; Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, 1:xxxiv.

32 MichSyr 3:147, 4:565, Ibrahim 568, fol. 287^r, lines 6 from bottom–4 from bottom; Gyllenhaal, "Byzantine Melitene," 221–222.

33 Ed. Chabot, 2:283–84, trans. Abouna, 213–14. See Fiey, in *ibid.*, 213, §a, n. 1; and now Gyllenhaal, "Byzantine Melitene," 210, n. 21, 211b. A folio is missing both before and after the excerpt from the Vita, such that we are missing the line with which the chronicle introduced the quotation and where an explicit reference to the Disciple's Vita might originally have been.

34 Hilken, *Anonymous Syriac Chronicle*, 18–19, 302.

35 *Ibid.*, 7–8.

36 The account of John bar 'Abdun's patriarchate in part 1 of Bar Hebraeus's *Ecclesiastical Chronicle* (ed. J. B. Abbeloos and T. J. Lamy, 3 vols. [Louvain, 1872–77], 1:419–31; trans. D. Wilmshurst [Piscataway, NJ, 2016], 144–48; cited by Grumel, *Regestes*², no. 839) appears to be an adaptation of the Disciple's Vita as preserved by Michael the Syrian (whose chronicle is Bar Hebraeus's basis for this time period; see trans. Wilmshurst, xvi–xvii; cited by Gyllenhaal, "Byzantine Melitene," 210, n. 21). Among Armenian sources should be mentioned the eleventh-century scholar Aristakes of Lastivert and his *History of Armenia* (covering 1000–1071/2), with its starkly negative image of Emperor Romanos III Argyros and his treatment of the Jacobite patriarch (in spite of Aristakes' tendency not only to critique but also to "justify" some imperial "polic[ies]," and to "accept" Byzantine suzerainty over Armenia, as pointed out by Arutiunova-Fidanjan, "Image of Byzantium," 82; and see above, n. 10). After narrating that Romanos encountered monks (who are understood to be Miaphysites) on the Black Mountain near Antioch (on which see J. Glynias, "Byzantine Monasticism on the Black Mountain West of Antioch in the 10th–11th Centuries," *Studies in Late Antiquity* 4.4 [2020]: 408–51), spurned their prayers, and conscripted them as archers, Aristakes explains (§6, as translated in *Aristakēs Lastivert's History*, trans. R. Bedrosian [New York, 1985], 32–33) that Romanos "greatly approved of the declaration of Chalcedon, and hated all orthodox [i.e., Miaphysite] believers. He took the Syrian bishop [i.e., John bar 'Abdun] to Constantinople, subjecting him to ridicule and ignominy. He ordered that his beard be shorn off, and that he be led around the squares and streets seated on an ass, to be spat upon. Later he ordered [John bar 'Abdun] taken into exile, where he died. The emperor was just such a fool. [. . .] Consequently, the righteous verdicts of God quickly came upon him." This passage is cited (alongside Michael the Syrian) by A. Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood: The Rise and Fall of Byzantium, 955 A.D. to the First Crusade* (New York, 2017), 160, n. 20 (printed on p. 331); in turn cited by A. Kaldellis, *Romanland: Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium* (Cambridge, MA, 2019), 253, n. 97 (printed on p. 322).

(Miaphysite) Christology of Severus, Dioscorus, and others, namely, that Christ's nature was at once human and divine.³⁷ This stood in contrast to the Dyophysite position, and in particular to the version of this position embraced by the Council of Chalcedon, that Christ had two natures, human and divine, which were inseparable but nevertheless distinct.³⁸

Dramatis personae

Enacting the events surrounding John bar 'Abdun were several core protagonists, as well as actors present in only some of the four versions of the story. In approximate order of appearance, they are:

1. *John bar 'Abdun*. For the Disciple's Vita, reproduced by Michael the Syrian, he was "my lord John bar 'Abdun," or simply "this blessed man."³⁹ Michael of Tanis saw him in a similar light: "there was on the throne of Antioch of the Syrian Jacobites, our brethren, a saintly father called John bar 'Abdun [*Yūḥannā ibn 'Abdūn*], who even resembled the first saintly fathers."⁴⁰ Alexios had a precisely inverted view of the Jacobite patriarch, whom he calls

the foremost of them in wickedness and rank,
John, the leader of the Jacobites' heresy and

not a patriarch—for whence [would he have obtained that title]?—but one who has fittingly gotten for himself the title of heresiarch and has been discovered to be self-elected and has grown old with the gray hair of his heresy.⁴¹

By contrast, to Yahyā he was a marginal figure, merely the Jacobites' "patriarch [*baṭrak*] named John [*Yūḥannā*] living in the region of Mar'ash, who was called the patriarch [*baṭriyark*] of Antioch," of whom the Byzantine emperor has never heard until news of his activities happened to reach his ears.⁴²

The two sources most sympathetic to John bar 'Abdun contain the most detailed information about John's life before the episode began, especially the Disciple's Vita preserved by Michael the Syrian. The narrative of the Disciple's Vita can be summarized as follows. Born in Melitene, John bar 'Abdun became a monk at the age of eighteen, entering the nearby Monastery of the Runner.⁴³ His father was displeased and forced him to return to the world. Only when Isaac the Runner himself, still at the monastery's helm, intervened did John's father relent and allow him to return to the monastery.⁴⁴ John was restless, moving first to the Monastery of Bar Ṣawmā,⁴⁵ then to a cave on the banks of the Euphrates. Because of his asceticism, God granted him miracles, which led to his renown.⁴⁶ On one occasion he fled a demon in the form of a voluptuous woman by walking on the river's rushing water, a Christ-like power that he retained thereafter. His fame

37 V. L. Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church* (New York, 2008), 60–64, 222–23; Tannous, *Making*, 11–14. For the alternate tradition that the Jacobites were followers of a different famous Miaphysite named Jacob, Jacob of Serug, see N. N. Seleznyov, "Jacobs and Jacobites: The Syrian Origins of the Name and Its Egyptian Arabic Interpretations," *Scrinium* 9 (2013): 382–98.

38 In the terminology of the day, *orthodoxy* was correct, divinely sanctioned belief, and any deviation from that orthodoxy was a *heresy*. These terms' referents therefore depended on the point of view of the one using them: to a Dyophysite, Miaphysite doctrine was heresy, and vice versa. For the Byzantine term *heresy* and its history, including mention of John of Damascus's typology and catalog of heresies (a key reference point for the later tradition, as emphasized by an anonymous reviewer), see T. E. Gregory, A. Kazhdan, and A. Cutler, "Heresy," *ODB* 2:918–20.

39 MichSyr 3:137, 4:560, Ibrahim 563, fol. 284^v, lines 19–21: *mār' Yūḥannān bar 'Abdūn . . . ḥānā fūbtānā*. John bar 'Abdun came to be celebrated by the Syrian Miaphysites as a saint and martyr, with a feast day on 1 February; J. M. Fiey, *Saints syriaques*, ed. L. I. Conrad, *Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* 6 (Princeton, 2004), 115 = no. 236.

40 HPEC 139, trans. (modified) 211: *kāna 'alā kursī Antākyat al-suryān al-ya'āqibah ikhwatinā aban [sic] qiddis yusammā Yūḥannā ibn 'Abdūn, ḥattā annahu ḏābā l-ābā' al-qiddisūn [sic] al-awwalin*.

41 Ficker, *Erlasse*, 12, lines 26–29: ὁ καὶ τὴν κακίαν τούτων πρῶτος καὶ τὸ ἀξίωμα Ἰωάννης, ὁ τῆς Ἰακωβιτῶν ἐξάρχων αἰρέσεως καὶ πατριάρχης μὲν οὐκέτι—πόθεν γάρ;—αἰρεσιάρχου δὲ προσηγορίαν εἰκότως ἀπενεγκάμενος αὐτοχειροτόνητος φωραθεὶς καὶ συγγρασας τῇ πόλει τῆς αἰρέσεως.

42 Yahyā, *Histoire* [2], 120. (For the Arabic text, see §1 of Yahyā's full account, quoted below.)

43 MichSyr 3:137, 4:560, Ibrahim 563, fol. 284^v: *daynā d-rahātā*. In secondary literature, the epithet "the Runner" often appears in Latin as "Cursor."

44 On Ignatios, metropolitan of Melitene, a.k.a. Isaac the Runner (not to be confused with the Ignatios, metropolitan of Melitene, who accompanied John bar 'Abdun to Constantinople and then capitulated, or with the Ignatios of Melitene who is one of Michael the Syrian's historiographical sources), and his monastery, see Dagron, "Minorités," 191.

45 On which, see E. Honigmann, *Le couvent de Barṣaumā et le patriarcat jacobite d'Antioche et de Syrie* (Louvain, 1954).

46 MichSyr 3:137, 4:561, Ibrahim 564.

was becoming overwhelming, so he resolved to flee. A certain man at Bar Şawmā, also named John, prophesied that the next day the man to lead the Church would arrive at the monastery—and so he did: John bar ‘Abdun himself. There John bar ‘Abdun had a dream vision of Saint Bar Şawmā, and the next night heard angels singing psalms in the monastery’s church. Soon after, he moved on to the Black Mountain, an area to the north of Antioch filled with monastic communities of various languages and confessions. When the (Jacobite) patriarch Athanasios died, a council of bishops elected John bar ‘Abdun as his successor; another vision convinced him to accept the election.⁴⁷ But his ordination posed a problem: only a priest could be made patriarch, but because of his extreme humility, John had never even become a deacon. And so, on three successive days, by three different bishops, he was ordained deacon, then priest, then patriarch.⁴⁸ As patriarch, we are told, John was content to allow his *synkellos* David to manage the patriarchate’s affairs—badly as it turned out. Meanwhile, John turned his own attention to pastoral care. This included curing the Roman (Byzantine) governor of Antioch of leprosy. The Chalcedonian patriarch of Antioch was so impressed with this feat that he wrote a letter to John and received in reply John’s shirt, which he treasured (as a contact relic). John bar ‘Abdun also performed many miracles at Melitene.⁴⁹

Michael of Tanis’s account of the trial’s prehistory is shorter. He begins with the death of Patriarch Athanasios, who announces as he dies “that this saint John bar ‘Abdun would sit after him on the throne of Antioch.”⁵⁰ This sets off a search for John bar ‘Abdun, who hides, so that the searchers mistake another monk named John for him and are on their way to make *him* patriarch when God punishes the imposter: a tree branch “struck the eye of John the monk and tore it out, and he instantly became one-eyed.” This leads to his confession, through which eventually John bar ‘Abdun is found and compelled to become patriarch.⁵¹

47 MichSyr 3:138, 4:561, Ibrahim 564.

48 MichSyr 3:138–39, 4:561, Ibrahim 564.

49 MichSyr 3:139, 4:562, Ibrahim 565.

50 HPEC 139, trans. 211: *inna hādā l-qiddīs Yūhannā ibn ‘Abdūn yajlis ba’dabu ‘alā kursī Anṭākyah*.

51 HPEC 139–40, trans. 211–12; quote at 140, trans. (modified) 212: *fa-ḡaraba ‘ūd min al-shajarah ‘ayn Yūhannā al-rāhib fa-qala ‘ahā fa-ṣāra a’war min sā’atih*.

In Michael of Tanis’s version, John bar ‘Abdun, once patriarch, does not ignore his see’s practical matters. Instead, his piety and miracles are bound up with them: “Money used to be brought to him as alms, but he only kept enough for his daily sustenance, and he gave the rest to the blameless and the poor.”⁵² Two miracle stories follow. The first proves John’s prayers to be more valuable than any money.⁵³ In the second, a young man working on a bridge drowns in a river, and John raises him from the dead (a miracle also found in the Disciple’s Vita). “This great sign became well known concerning him in all of Syria and elsewhere until news of it reached Egypt, and he became the pride of the orthodox and a grief for those who dissent.”⁵⁴

By 1028 he had been patriarch for twenty-four years. He had strong ties to his native Melitene and the region. Yet he resided at the monastery of Bārid, which “stood,” as Vest describes, “on the rugged mountain range . . . of Berit Dağı.”⁵⁵ The most direct route was 130 km.⁵⁶ This distance, perhaps a four- or five-day walk, suited his episcopal role and was perhaps preferable to sharing Melitene with the bishop he appointed to that see; this distance may have helped elevate him above the city’s locality, reinforcing his greater regional claims and the injustice of his exile from his see of Antioch on the Orontes.⁵⁷

2. *John, metropolitan of Melitene.* The Disciple’s Vita calls him Nikephoros,⁵⁸ but the metropolitan’s patriarch,

52 HPEC 140, trans. (modified) 212–13: *wa-kānat al-amwāl tuḥmal ilayhi bi-rasm al-ṣadaqāt wa-lā yubqī minhā illā qūt yawmihī wa-yadfa’ al-bāqī li-l-mastūrīn wa-l-fuḡarā’*. A word that Michael of Tanis uses frequently, *mastūrīn*, here ‘blameless’, is rendered in the published translation as ‘the hidden’ and glossed in a footnote as “the rich man who has become poor and cannot openly beg” (HPEC trans. 63, n. 1). But *mastūr*, ‘covered’, can have the sense of ‘righteous’ or ‘blameless’; see Ibn Manẓūr (d. 1311/2 CE), *Lisān al-‘Arab*, s.v. *s-t-r*: *wa-rajjulun mastūrūn wa-satīrūn, ay ‘afḡfun*.

53 See below, n. 207.

54 HPEC 141, trans. (modified) 214: *wa-shtabarat ‘anbu hādhibi l-āyah al-‘azīmah fī jamī’ bilād Sūriyah wa-ghayrihā ḥattā waṣala khabaruhā ilā bilād Miṣr wa-ṣāra fakbr al-urtuduksiyyīn wa-ḥuzznan li-l-mukhālīfīn*. Cf. MichSyr 3:140, 4:562, Ibrahim 565.

55 Vest, *Geschichte*, 1193.

56 Ibid., 1195.

57 I thank Maureen Miller for this suggestion.

58 An Armenian translation of Michael the Syrian’s *Chronicle*, meanwhile, gives this metropolitan’s name as Theodore; Vest, *Geschichte*, 1200. In this case the Armenian translator may have been

Alexios, calls him John, and the metropolitan himself signed his name John at the end of Alexios's synodal decree of 1030.⁵⁹ The Chalcedonian metropolitan bishop of Melitene is portrayed as roughly the inverse of each narrator's image of John bar 'Abdun, though in varying proportions—only in the Disciple's Vita does his profile compare in scale to that of the Jacobite patriarch. Alexios states that “the fire of divine zeal” compelled “John, the most holy metropolitan of Melitene,” to raise a complaint against John bar 'Abdun and his followers.⁶⁰ Alexios, however, allows the Chalcedonian John to fade from the narrative as it proceeds, overshadowed by the emperor Romanos and Alexios himself. Yahyā's brief rendering of the events entirely omits the Chalcedonian John, whose role has been folded anonymously into the opening line, in which news about John bar 'Abdun “reached the emperor Romanos.”

By contrast, in the sources hostile to the Chalcedonian John, his role looms large. For Michael of Tanis, as “the bishop of Melitene” he plays a large role in the synodal proceedings,⁶¹ while the Disciple's Vita focuses solely on the villainous metropolitan, erasing Alexios from the narrative entirely. Thus, the Miaphysites make him out to be the evil mastermind behind the events, while the Chalcedonian narrators marginalize him. Alexios's official record gives him the praise due to his rank, but Yahyā's concision sees no need to name the informant at all. This suggests divergent attempts to frame John bar 'Abdun's arrest: Chalcedonians prefer to frame it as action taken by orthodox authorities in the capital against a provincial heretic, while Miaphysites frame it as a local dispute that was unfairly adjudicated in the capital because of the Chalcedonian John's connections there.

misled by the line in the narration of the trial where the metropolitan of Melitene summons a translator: *targmānā aqīm mītrān itaw^{hy} hūwā men Mēliṭīnī šmeḥ Tāwdūrūs bar tawdīthōn* (MichSyr 3:142, 4:563, Ibrahim 566, fol. 286^r, col. 2, lines 8 from bottom–6 from bottom), “the metropolitan called up a translator who was from Melitene; his name was Theodore, [and he was] of their confession [i.e., Chalcedonian].” (On this translator, see further below, n. 182.) The Syriac could easily be misconstrued to attach the entire description of origin, name, and confession to “the metropolitan,” which appears after “a translator.”

59 Ficker, *Erlasse*, 10 and n. 4, 19.

60 Ibid., 10, lines 13–16: Ἰωάννην τὸν ἱερώτατον μητροπολίτην Μελιτινῆς . . . ὃς πρὶ θεοῦ ζήλου διαναφθεῖς τὴν ψυχὴν. See now Gyllenhaal, “Byzantine Melitene,” 227 and n. 119.

61 E.g., *HPEC* 143, trans. 217: *usqf Malatyah*.

Several lead seals that the metropolitan John used to authenticate documents or correspondence (a common practice in eleventh-century Byzantium) survive.⁶² Three bear the imprint of the same seal-making device (*boulloterion*),⁶³ with the words, “John, by God's mercy, metropolitan of Melitene.” After receiving an additional title, the metropolitan duly swapped out his old *boulloterion* for a new one, which he used to stamp a fourth surviving seal that reads, “John, metropolitan of Melitene and *synkellos*.”⁶⁴ Both versions of his seal bear, on the obverse side, a bust of Saint John Chrysostom.⁶⁵ John Chrysostom, the famous orator of Antioch, combat of heresy, and archbishop of Constantinople (398–404), was a popular saint for eleventh-century civil administrators and bishops to have on their seals.⁶⁶ In John's case, the choice is clearly appropriate because he shares his given name with the saint, but it would also have bolstered a self-presentation as an upholder of orthodoxy.

According to the Disciple's Vita, the Chalcedonian John had long been complaining about the Jacobites, beginning already “in the time of Basil [II] and Constantine” (r. 976–1025) while the *Chronicle of 1234*'s epitome of the Vita has the repeated complaints begin only in the time of Romanos (r. 1028–1034).⁶⁷ It also seems that John was a Constantinopolitan, or was at least educated in the capital—this is the impression

62 See N. Oikonomides, “The Usual Lead Seal,” *DOP* 37 (1983): 147–57.

63 On the pincers used to stamp lead seals onto documents, see *ibid.*, 148, n. 8, referring to the mention of Alexios's seal at the end of the decree studied in the present article (Ficker, *Erlasse*, 21, line 12).

64 *DOSeals*, 4:159–60: no. 68.8–9: [Ι]ω(άννης) ἐλέω Θε(ο)ῦ μ(η)τροπολίτ(ης) Μελιτ(η)νῆς (two seals); and Ἰω(άννη) μ(η)τροπολίτ(ης) Μελιτ(η)νῆς (καὶ) συγγ(ε)λ(λ)ω [*sic*]. Cited by Vest, *Geschichte*, 1199–200. The third specimen from the first *boulloterion* is described in J.-C. Cheynet, C. Morisson, and W. Seibt, *Les sceaux byzantins de la collection Henri Seyrig* (Paris, 1991), 176 = no. 258; cited in *DOSeals*, 4:159.

65 As mentioned by Vest, *Geschichte*, 1199–200. Both versions show the bishop-saint holding a book; in the earlier version his other hand makes the sign of a blessing, while the later version shows him carrying a “patriarchal cross”; *DOSeals*, 4:159–60.

66 J. Cotsonis, “The Contribution of Byzantine Lead Seals to the Study of the Cult of the Saints (Sixth–Twelfth Century),” *Byzantion* 75 (2005): 383–497, at 429–33, whose analysis shows that overall, Chrysostom is about as frequent on eleventh-century seals as Basil of Caesarea, though Saint Nicholas completely outshines both.

67 MichSyr 3:140, 4:562, Ibrahim 565; *Chronicle of 1234*, ed. Chabot, 2:283, trans. Abouna, 213; cited by Vest, *Geschichte*, 1201.

given by the funeral oration for the metropolitan composed by Michael Psellos (1018–1078?).⁶⁸ There John is described as having studied philosophy and considering whether to pursue a career in the senate or in the church.⁶⁹ Michael the Syrian claims that Romanos Argyros and the Chalcedonian John had been schoolmates,⁷⁰ which is not entirely implausible, since, like Romanos, John began his career in law,⁷¹ according to Psellos's speech.⁷² For his fight against the Jacobites, Psellos portrays John as a virtuous defender of the faith. It has been suggested that John of Melitene may be identical to the unnamed metropolitan of Melitene appearing as a litigant in 1033 before the judge Eustathios Rhomaïos, who ruled against him in this case.⁷³ If

68 Psellos, *Orationes funebres: Vol. 1*, ed. I. Polemis, Teubner (Berlin, 2014), 180–87 = oration 5; based on the *editio princeps* by P. Gautier, “Monodies inédites de Michel Psellos,” *REB* 36 (1978): 83–151, at 97–104. Gautier (*ibid.*, 84, 98, n. 1) viewed the oration as a rhetorical exercise, since Psellos begins by declaring that he did not know the deceased beyond the well-known coordinates of this prominent individual's career (namely, “how long he had been managing the see of Melitene when, in his old age, he died,” εἰ μὴ ὅσον τὸν τῆς Μελιτηνῆς διέπων θρόνον ἐν γῆρᾳ τετελευτήκει, §1, lines 19–20, ed. Polemis, 180). Although this is a plausible inference from the speech's opening and the generality of the description of the metropolitan's career path, this does not mean that it offers “no concrete information on the metropolitan's career” (Gautier, “Monodies,” 98, n. 1); even if the details of each stage of the career path are idealized and general, they nevertheless must reflect the publicly known facts about the career of a powerful member of the ruling elite. For Psellos's birth and death dates, see S. Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos: Rhetoric and Authorship in Byzantium* (New York, 2013), 4, 13, n. 36.

69 §2, line 20–§3, line 7, ed. Polemis, 181–82.

70 MichSyr 3:140, 4:562, Ibrahim 565; cited by Vest, *Geschichte*, 1201.

71 Romanos was a “former judge,” as emphasized by Chitwood, *Byzantine Legal Culture*, 82, 134.

72 §3, lines 9–11, ed. Polemis, 182: κριτῆς δὲ αὐτὸς ἐφειστήκει τοῖς πράγμασιν, οὐδενὶ μὲν ἀλόγως προσχωρῶν, διαιτῶν δὲ ἑαυτῷ μετὰ συνέσεως τὰς ἐν ἑκατέρῳ ῥοπὰς καὶ τῇ κρείττονι προστιθέμενος, which is to say: he was a fair and just judge—generic praise, but clear evidence of this first stage in the metropolitan's career.

73 I owe my awareness of this suggestion to an anonymous reviewer. The suggestion is made in the entry on John of Melitene in *PBW* (2016), Ioannes 272 (<https://pbw2016.kdl.kcl.ac.uk/person/108976/>); see also the entry on the unnamed metropolitan of Melitene, Anonymus 12193 (<https://pbw2016.kdl.kcl.ac.uk/person/156936/>). As described by the latter entry, in 1033 the anonymous metropolitan “was subject to trial before Eustathios 61 at a court at the Bosphoros in connection with the institution of chamaidikastes (a subordinate judge appointed not by the emperor but by a thematic judge).” The passage referenced—Eustathios, *Peira*, 51.10, ed. K. E.

this identification is correct, it would complicate any assumption that John of Melitene was an imperial favorite, working intimately with the emperor to enact a shared agenda.⁷⁴ Regardless of whether the identification is correct, we should probably imagine instead that John of Melitene was a useful ally for the emperor and Patriarch Alexios in particular circumstances—an alliance facilitated, but not assured, by the fact that he too belonged to the Constantinopolitan elite, and had been educated accordingly, perhaps even alongside Romanos.

3. *Romanos Argyros, emperor of the Romans.* When Basil II died in 1025, his brother Constantine VIII, who had been co-emperor all along, finally became sole ruler at an advanced age. Near death with no heir several years later, he sought out the eparch of Constantinople, Romanos Argyros, who had previously been *krites* of the Hippodrome and of the Opsikion theme, and who came from a family of high officials.⁷⁵ But the eparch was married at the time, so Constantine coerced him to divorce his wife and marry Zoe, Constantine's daughter, in her place. When Constantine died, Romanos, on 12 November 1028, became sole emperor.⁷⁶

Even before he was crowned, Romanos had known Patriarch Alexios well, since he had served under him as the top administrator (οἰκονόμος) of the Great Church, responsible for overseeing the patriarchate's property.⁷⁷ Alexios was instrumental in legitimizing Romanos's divorce and immediate remarriage, and, as emperor, Romanos seems to have continued to be Alexios's ally.⁷⁸

Zachariä von Lingenthal, in Zepos, *Jus*, 4:214—records that the outcome was a ruling “against the metropolitan of Melitene” (κατὰ τοῦ μητροπολίτου Μελιτινῆς).

74 This observation too echoes a point made by the same anonymous reviewer.

75 G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, trans. J. M. Hussey, rev. ed. (New Brunswick, NJ, 1969), 321–22. For Romanos's titles and his family, see J.-C. Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance (963–1210)*, Byzantina Sorbonensia 9 (Paris, 1990), 41, 193.

76 Vest, *Geschichte*, 1201.

77 V. Stanković, “The Alexios Stoudites' Patriarchate (1025–1043): A Developmental Stage in Patriarchal Power,” *ZRVI* 39 (2001): 69–87, at 75; article cited by Chitwood, “Patriarch Alexios,” 296, n. 7. See also C. M. Brand and A. Cutler, “Romanos III Argyros,” *ODB* 3:1807; P. Magdalino and A.-M. Talbot, “Oikonomos,” *ODB* 3:1517.

78 Stanković, “Alexios Stoudites' Patriarchate,” 75–76; Chitwood, “Patriarch Alexios,” 295–96. Now see also Gyllenhaal, “Byzantine Melitene,” 220.

Our four narrators give Romanos a similar role and prominence. The Miaphysite narratives (Michael of Tanis and the Disciple's Vita), however, mitigate the emperor's responsibility (as discussed below in "Convergences").

4. *John Chrysoberges, Byzantine administrator of Melitene.* A high-ranking official responsible for the administration of Melitene and the surrounding region, John Chrysoberges is only mentioned by Syriac narrative sources: the Disciple's Vita and chronicles that use it as a source. In Syriac he is called *Krūsobūrgī grīṭīs*, "Chrysoberges the *krites*," a Greek title (lit. judge) that identifies him as the regional governor based in Melitene.⁷⁹ An extant Byzantine seal expands upon this: "Lord, save your slave John Chrysoberges, *spatharokandidatos*; head secretary⁸⁰ of the *genikon*; *krites*, *anagrapheus* [assessor], and *kourator* [manager of imperial estates] of Melitene."⁸¹ The first title pertains to his rank: *spatharokandidatos* was a middling dignity. The other titles describe the offices he held. The *genikon* was the central fiscal department with empire-wide jurisdiction.⁸² As the chief civil administrator (*krites*) of the region around Melitene, he apparently also served as its *anagrapheus*, an official who in the eleventh century was responsible for keeping the tax rolls and enforcement,⁸³ and its *kourator*, who oversaw the estates held directly by the imperial fisc.⁸⁴ Other members of the influential Chrysoberges family also appear as

provincial administrators around this time.⁸⁵ Moreover, a Chrysoberges had been patriarch of Constantinople in the late tenth century, and another, who in his earlier career was a monk near Mount Olympus in Bithynia, was the Byzantine appointee to the patriarchal see of Antioch in the mid-eleventh century.⁸⁶ Thus, John Chrysoberges was a powerful official in Melitene from an ambitious Constantinopolitan family.

5. *Alexios the Stoudite.* In addition to narrating the events in his synodal decrees, the Byzantine patriarch of Constantinople was also a participant in the drama. His profile bore some parallels to that of John bar 'Abdun: before becoming patriarch, he had been a monk; his elevation to the rank of patriarch was somewhat irregular; and, most obviously, his episcopal position made him the manager of a large organization with considerable property. While Alexios was not credited with miracles, his visit to Emperor Basil II's deathbed with the head of John the Baptist figures him too as providing access to the divine. And where John bar 'Abdun required a triple ordination, Alexios was accused of "acceding to the throne uncanonically" since he was made patriarch "not by a vote of archpriests, but by command of the emperor Basil."⁸⁷ Alexios leveraged his office, and in particular his role of legitimizing Romanos's (and subsequent emperors') marriages to Zoe, not only to obtain additional fiscal privileges for the church, but also apparently to obtain donations to his own private monastery.⁸⁸

79 MichSyr 3:140, 4:562, Ibrahim 565, fol. 285^v, col. 2, line 22. See A. Kazhdan, "Judge," *ODB* 2:1078.

80 *protokankellarios*; see A. Kazhdan, "Kankellarios," *ODB* 2:1101.

81 *DOSeals*, 4:159 = no. 68.6; cited by Vest, *Geschichte*, 1202, n. 5: Κ(ύρι)ε β(οή)θ(ει) [τ]ῷ σ(α)ῶ(ν)τι [λ(α)ῶ]ν (ἀνν)η σπαθ[αρ]οκ(αν)δ(ι)δ(α)τω(ν) (καί) [(πρωτο)]καγκ(ε)λλαρίω [τ(οῦ)] γενο(ῦ), κριτ(ῆ), [ἀν]αγρα[φ(ε)] (καί) κουρά[τ(ω)ρι] Μελιτ(η)ν(ῆ)ς τῷ Χρ(υσο)βέ(ρ)γ(η). See also Gyllenhaal, "Byzantine Melitene," 223, n. 101, esp. for the term *kourator*.

82 See N. Oikonomides, ed. and trans., *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IX^e et X^e siècles* (Paris, 1972), 313–14; A. Kazhdan, "Genikon," *ODB* 2:829–30.

83 A. Kazhdan, "Anagrapheus," *ODB* 1:84.

84 A. Kazhdan, "Kourator," *ODB* 2:1155–56. See also Oikonomides, *Les listes*, 241, 242, 356, where Oikonomides notes that the imperial estates (*kouratoreia*) of Melitene must have consisted largely of land abandoned by those who fled the Byzantine conquest of the city in 934 rather than convert to Christianity. For the possibility that *kourator* was an office with wider duties, see (with references) Gyllenhaal, "Byzantine Melitene," 217, n. 63, 223, n. 101.

85 As with John, these administrators are known from seals, and one, "Peter Chrysoberges, *patrikios* and judge of the *velum* and Charsianon [a district in Cappadocia]," was also stationed in the East; A. Kazhdan, "Chrysoberges," *ODB* 1:450–51.

86 (1) Nicholas II Chrysoberges, patriarch of Constantinople 980–992; (2) Theodosios III Chrysoberges, patriarch of Antioch "before 30 August 1057 until after 4 April 1059"; Vest, *Geschichte*, 1202, n. 4; K.-P. Todt, "Region und griechisch-orthodoxes Patriarchat von Antiochia in mittelbyzantinischer Zeit (969–1084)," *BZ* 94.1 (2001): 239–67, at 260. For the chronology of Nicholas Chrysoberges' episcopate, see J. Darrouzès, "Sur la chronologie du patriarche Antoine III Stoudite," *REB* 46 (1988): 55–60, at 60; followed by Todt, "Region" [*BZ*], 260.

87 John Skylitzes, *Σύνοψις ἱστοριῶν*, *Michael IV*, §12, ed. Thurn, 401 [= Kedrenos, PG 122:249C–D], trans. (modified) Wortley, 378: Ἐπειδὴ, ὡς φατε, οὐ ψήφω ἀρχιερέων, ἀλλὰ προστάξει βασιλείου τοῦ βασιλέως ἐπέβην τοῦ θρόνου ἀκανονίστως. In this passage Alexios himself is reported as repeating the accusations of rivals who sought to replace him.

88 Chitwood, "Patriarch Alexios," 296, who notes that the typikon for Alexios's monastery survives in Slavonic translation. During his life, "that most holy patriarch, lord Alexios, restored the monastery

6. *Nicholas the Stoudite, patriarch of Antioch.* Alexios's predecessor as *begoumenos* of the Stoudios Monastery was Nicholas.⁸⁹ Yahyā of Antioch notes that Nicholas was the Stoudite *begoumenos* when he was consecrated patriarch of Antioch on 17 January 1025.⁹⁰ He was a strict ascetic who practiced *alousia*, meaning that he never bathed.⁹¹ He would occupy Antioch's see until 1030.

7. *The bishops in John bar 'Abdun's entourage.* Of the bishops accompanying John bar 'Abdun, Alexios mentions only those who capitulate and acknowledge the Council of Chalcedon: "Ignatios, [a bishop] in the district of Melitene; Zachakios, [bishop] of Arca; and Moses, from Mesopotamia."⁹² This mostly accords with the list in the Disciple's Vita, where Ignatios was bishop of Melitene itself; the bishop of Arca (near Melitene) is called Isaac (*ʾĪshāq*, from which "Zachakios" could be derived); and Moses's see is named as Khartpert, in eastern Anatolia, ca. one hundred km roughly north-east of Melitene.⁹³ Michael of Tanis writes, "There were

among [John and his followers] two elderly metropolitans, and when they learned" that the emperor would release them if they capitulated, "they acknowledged the Council of Chalcedon, thinking that they would remain in their former rank, but the patriarch of the Melkites [i.e., Chalcedonian Christians] did not leave them [as they were], but made them both subdeacons. The two other [metropolitans] held fast to their faith, nor did they agree to what the emperor [*malik*] wished."⁹⁴

The Narratives

I now turn to the four narratives and how each portrays the events, in particular focusing on how they depict social groups based on ethnic or confessional labels, beginning with the synodal decree of Patriarch Alexios.

Alexios

Alexios's synodal decree seeks to connect John bar 'Abdun to heretics condemned by councils of the past, a standard historically minded approach used in ecclesiastical disputes across time. One aspect of his account, however, is worth highlighting, namely, that the Jacobite patriarch and his associates are described as being a limb of the universal church that needs to be cut off. On the one hand, this image is unsurprising,

that is called 'of lord Alexios,'" as Theodore Balsamon, the twelfth-century canonist, records. Balsamon implies from the context that Alexios did so "from his private purse [οἰκοθεν]"; Balsamon, commentary to canon 7 of the "Photian" synod of Constantinople, PG 137:1041D–1042A; cited by S. Petrides, in *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques* (Paris, 1912–), 2:393. Balsamon cites this deed as evidence that it was permissible for bishops to renovate monasteries as long as they did not harm the financial resources of their bishopric. For privately owned monasteries and churches, see J. P. Thomas, *Private Religious Foundations in the Byzantine Empire*, DOS 24 (Washington, DC, 1987).

89 K.-P. Todt, "Region und griechisch-orthodoxes Patriarchat von Antiocheia in mittelbyzantinischer Zeit und im Zeitalter der Kreuzzüge (969–1204)" (*Habilitationsschrift*, Universität Mainz, 1998), 660–63; and now K.-P. Todt, *Dukat und griechisch-orthodoxes Patriarchat von Antiocheia in mittelbyzantinischer Zeit (969–1084)*, Mainzer Veröffentlichungen zur Byzantinistik 14 (Wiesbaden, 2020), 322–25.

90 Yahyā, *Histoire* [2], 102: *ra'is dayr al-iṣṭūdiyyūn*. Yahyā's two dates do not quite match up, but see Micheau and Troupeau's note, p. 102, n. 75.

91 Todt, "Region" [Habil.], 660–61 (and now Todt, *Dukat*, 322–23); Vest, *Geschichte*, 1175–76; Benner, "Die syrisch-jakobitische Kirche," 85, n. 40.

92 Ficker, *Erlasse*, 13, lines 15–17: Ἰγνάτιος τε ὁ ἐν τῇ περιοικίδι Μελιτηνῆς καὶ Ζαχαρίας ὁ Ἀρκῆς καὶ ὁ ἀπὸ Μεσσοποταμίας Μωϋσῆς.

93 MichSyr 3:141, 143; 4:563, 564; Ibrahim 566, 567; cited by Ficker, *Erlasse*, 13, n. 4. The transformation of *ʾĪshāq* to *ζαχαρίας* seems plausible, especially since Semitic *h* is often transcribed with *χ* in Greek. For Arca (Syriac *ʾArqā*; modern Turkish *Akçadağ*), see T. Mitford et al., *Pleiades*, s.v. Arca (<http://pleiades.stoa.org/places/628929>, accessed 7 November

2015); cited by Th. A. Carlson and D. A. Michelson, *The Syriac Gazetteer*, s.v. 'Arqa (<http://syriaca.org/place/431>, entry published 5 November 2014). For Khartpert (*Ḥesnā d-Zayā'd*, in MichSyr 4:564, Ibrahim 567, fol. 286^v, col. 2, line 4; Arabic *Ḥiṣn Ziyād*; Armenian *Kharput*; modern Turkish *Harput*), see *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden, 1960–2004, hereafter *EP*), s.v. Khartpert (Cl. Cahen); and Carlson and Michelson, *The Syriac Gazetteer*, s.v. Kharput (<http://syriaca.org/place/330>, entry published 30 June 2014).

94 HPEC 144, trans. (modified) 219: *wa-kāna minhum shaykhayn [sic] maṭrānayn fa-lammā 'alimā bi-dhālik i'tarafā bi-majma' Khalqidūniyah wa-ḡannā annahumā yabqiyyā fī ṭaqsihimā l-awwal, fa-lam yatrūk-humā baṭrak al-malakiyyah, bal ja'alahumā ibūdiyāqunayn, wa-ammā l-ithnayn al-ākhar [sic] fa-innahumā tamassakā bi-imānatihimā wa-lam yujibā ilā mā arādahu l-malik*. Here the term *malakī* clearly refers not to Arabophone Chalcedonian Christians in particular, but rather to all adherents of the "imperial" (Byzantine) Church: Chalcedonian Christians, whether speakers of Arabic or, as in this case, of Greek; see n. 1 above. As for the title *malik* and the longer form *malik al-Rūm*, these were standard ways to refer in Arabic to the Byzantine head of state (known in English as the Byzantine emperor, not king). These Arabic titles are literal translations of the emperor's Greek title βασιλεὺς (τῶν Ῥωμαίων), on which, see E. K. Chrysos, "The Title Βασιλεὺς in Early Byzantine International Relations," *DOP* 32 (1978): 29–75.

because it is grounded in earlier conciliar language. On the other hand, it is quite striking, because it implies that before Alexios's intervention, John bar 'Abdun and his entourage were in fact part of that same universal church, which is to say, the Roman (Byzantine) Chalcedonian church led by the patriarchs of Rome (the pope), Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem.

The decree's long preface seeks to position John bar 'Abdun personally as the latest in a long line of heretics. "When the evangelical and divine proclamation," it begins, "had spread over almost the entire earth through the inspiration of the life-ruling Spirit, and the multifarious"⁹⁵ error of the demons had been driven out, the peace that overpowers every mind"—to paraphrase the apostle Paul—"took hold of those instructed by Reason [τῷ λόγῳ]."⁹⁶ Thus, Alexios begins with a history of Christianity from its victory over paganism. He then moves to the idealized period of the universal, harmonious early church: "they inherit[ed] this peace as a patrimony from . . . Christ and maintain[ed] the bond of love and unanimity with him and with each other unbroken."⁹⁷ But the devil "laid snares beside our path," and, "finding suitable"⁹⁸ instruments of his wickedness . . . , *from within* he stirred up for us a war against the church, *encroaching upon* and ruining its beautiful perfection."⁹⁹ This is followed by a list of key heresiarchs, ending with "Dioskoros, along with

Eutyches and Severus, and the rest of the register of the deranged church of the headless"—that is to say, three influential Miaphysite churchmen (the first two condemned at the Council of Chalcedon, the last a sixth-century Miaphysite patriarch of Antioch), along with their successors (the *leaders* of the Miaphysites, as the context makes clear), all insultingly referred to as "the headless."¹⁰⁰

Two terms, "from within" and "encroach," display a tension in Alexios's presentation of heretics. Heretics come from within, and yet they are trespassers, that is, from without. As his account of heresy and orthodoxy continues, Alexios invokes the image of heresy as a weed. The defenders of orthodoxy (the bishops subscribing to the seven ecumenical councils recognized by the Byzantine church) took up "the blade of the all-powerful, divine spirit" (i.e., rational arguments inspired by the holy spirit) to "cut out the foreign dogmas of impiety from their roots and free the pure seed of orthodoxy from the ill-treatment and oppression of the *zizania*,"¹⁰¹ a reference to the weeds that, as Jesus had taught, the farmer's "enemy sowed in the midst of the wheat."¹⁰² This agricultural metaphor makes sense of the tension by explaining that while the weeds were almost completely eradicated by the seven ecumenical councils, "some men still secretly lurked and smoldered

95 πολυσχεδούς, corrected by Ficker to πολυσχιδούς; but see G. W. H. Lampe, ed., *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1961); and *LBG*, s.v. πολυσχεδής.

96 Ficker, *Erlasse*, 8, lines 3–7: Τοῦ εὐαγγελικοῦ καὶ θεοῦ κηρύγματος διὰ τῆς τοῦ ζωαρχικοῦ πνεύματος ἐπιπνοίας εἰς πᾶσαν σχεδὸν ἐφαπλωθέντος τὴν γῆν, καὶ τῆς πολυσχιδούς τῶν δαιμόνων πλάνης ἀπελαθείσης, εἶχε μὲν τοὺς τῷ λόγῳ μαθητευθέντας ἢ ὑπερβάλλουσα πάντα νοῦν εἰρήνην. Cf. Phil 4:7 (καὶ ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ ὑπερέχουσα πάντα νοῦν); I owe this reference to David DeVore. For the divine Logos (Christ) as the "source of man's rationality," see Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, s.v. λόγος II.D.

97 Ficker, *Erlasse*, 8, lines 7–10: ἦν ὡς πατρῶν κληρον παρὰ τοῦ λυτρωτοῦ καὶ δεσπότου καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Χριστοῦ διαδεξάμενοι καὶ τὸν τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ ὁμοιότητος σύνδεσμον πρὸς αὐτόν τε καὶ ἀλλήλους ἄρρηκτον διασφύζοντες.

98 Reading προσφυῇ (Ficker), for the manuscript's προσφούς.

99 Ficker, *Erlasse*, 8, lines 17–21: ἐχόμενα τριβου σκάνδαλα ἔθετο. . . . Ὅργανα γὰρ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ μοχθηρίας εὐρών προσφυῇ, κατηρτισμένα σκευὴ δηλαδὴ πρὸς ἀπώλειαν, ἐνδοθεν ἡμῖν κατὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἐπήγειρε πόλεμον, τὸ καλὸν ταύτης ἐπινεμόμενον καὶ διαφθείροντα πλήρωμα. (Emphasis added.)

100 Ibid., 8, lines 22–24: Ἀρειος οὗτος ἦν καὶ Σαβέλλιος, Μακεδόنيος καὶ Ἀπολινάριος [*sic* Ficker], Νεστορίου καὶ Διόσκορος σὺν Εὐτυχεὶ καὶ Σεβήρῳ καὶ ὁ λοιπὸς τῆς φρενοβλαβοῦς τῶν Ἀκεφάλων τῆς ἐκκλησίας κατάλογος. Alexios goes on to describe how these Miaphysites lead people astray (ibid., 8, line 29–9, line 3), making clear he is talking only about those who champion Miaphysite doctrine, not all who accept it. For the background of "headless" as a term of insult for Miaphysites, see (with references) L. S. B. MacCoull, "Isidore and the *Akephaloi*," *GRBS* 39.2 (1998): 169–78, at 170 and n. 5.

101 Ficker, *Erlasse*, 9, lines 4–7: ἢ . . . τοῦ πανσθενοῦς καὶ θεοῦ πνεύματος μάχαιρα . . . τὰ ἀλλόφυλα τῆς ἀσεβείας ῥίζοθεν ἐξέτεμον δόγματα.

102 Matt 13:25. In that version of the story, however, the farmer insists on leaving the weeds in place—lest good wheat be rooted out along with the weeds—until harvest time. Cf. also the language of weeds in the *Life* of Theodore of Edessa, written before 1023 (see K.-P. Todt and M. N. Swanson, "Life of Theodore, Bishop of Edessa," in Thomas and Mallett, *Christian-Muslim Relations*, 2:585–93, at 585); for example §46, ed. I. Pomialovskii (Petersburg, 1892), 41: Ἐπεὶ δὲ πολλὰ ζιζάνια τῶν αἱρέσεων ἐώρα ἐν ἐκείνῃ κατασπαρέντα τῇ πόλει παρὰ τοῦ σπορέως τῶν τοιούτων πονηρῶν σπερμάτων διαβόλου. Ephrem the Syrian likewise equates weeds (*zizāne*) with heresies; *Against Heresies*, hymn 23, stanza 1 (trans. A. C. McCollum, posted at <https://archive.org/details/EphremSyrusHymnsAgainstHeresies23And24>).

in the regions around Syria, wicked farmers of the evil seeds of the headless false doctrine.”¹⁰³ In the fifth century, Syria had been Roman territory, but by the eleventh it had become foreign; what was indigenous to the church has taken on a certain externality, so that now it can invade *from outside*:

Taking prisoner there the souls of simpler men and driving them together toward the pit of their own destruction, while little by little creeping toward and encroaching upon the cities and lands neighboring on Roman territory, they spread to the same extent the damage of their own derangement. And so they proceeded to dare a still more shameless rebellion, calling themselves patriarchs, I should say heresiarchs, and metropolitans and bishops. Madness!¹⁰⁴

The confusion that these imposters have spread can be seen in how Alexios attempts to distinguish them from Chalcedonians as he continues:

From then on, they grew furtively and adulterously on the foreign territory of our right-believing bishops;¹⁰⁵ occupied churches; established monasteries in villages and cities; and carried out unlawful rival assemblies and litanies, along with ordinations, against every ecclesiastical and canonical specification and tradition.¹⁰⁶

103 Ficker, *Erlasse*, 9, lines 12–14: Ἐλάνθανον δὲ ἄρα τινὲς τοῖς περὶ τὴν Συρίαν αὐθὶς ἐμφωλεύοντες καὶ ὑποθαλπόμενοι μέρεσι, τῶν πονηρῶν τῆς ἀκεφάλου κακοδοξίας σπερμάτων πονηρότεροι γεωργοί.

104 Ibid., 9, lines 14–22: αἰχμαλωτίζοντες μὲν ἐκέισε τὰς τῶν ἀπλουστέρων ψυχὰς καὶ πρὸς τὸ τῆς ἑαυτῶν ἀπωλείας συνελαύνοντες βάραθρον, κατὰ μικρὸν δὲ καὶ πρὸς τὰς ἐχομένας τῆς Ῥωμαϊκῆς ἐπικρατείας πόλεις καὶ χώρας ἔρποντες καὶ ἐπινεμόμενοι, εἰς τοσοῦτον τὴν τῆς ἑαυτῶν ἀπονοίας λύμην ἐφῆπλωσαν, ὥς καὶ πρὸς ἀναιδεστεράς ἀποστασίας τολμῆν χωρήσαι καὶ πατριάρχας ἑαυτοῖς ἢ μᾶλλον εἰπεῖν αἰρεσιάρχους καὶ μητροπολιτῶν καὶ ἐπισκόπων—ὧ τῆς παραπληξίας—ἐπιφημίσαι δνόματα.

105 Or “the bishops who are orthodox as far as we are concerned” (τῶν καθ’ ἡμᾶς ὀρθοδόξων); either way, this locution points to the challenge of devising rhetoric that claims universality for “our” doctrine but at the same time specifying that it is “our” orthodoxy that is meant, as opposed to the competing orthodoxies proclaimed by others.

106 Ibid., 9, lines 22–27: κἀντεῦθεν ταῖς ἄλλοτρίαις ἐνορίαις τῶν καθ’ ἡμᾶς ὀρθοδόξων ἐπισκόπων ληστρικῶς ἅμα καὶ μοικρικῶς ἐπιφύεσθαι ἐκκλησίας τε κατέχειν καὶ μοναστήρια συνιστᾶν ἐν κώμαις καὶ πόλεσι καὶ

These perverse cultivators of weeds have spread their noxious seed *into* Roman territory. Speaking of heresy in general, Alexios has managed to construct an image in which long ago, these heresies had been planted *within* the church, *within* the Roman Empire, but were now invaders from outside. Foreign from the beginning even when autochthonous (having been planted by the Devil), these heresies could now be viewed as a foreign invasive species, distinct even if interspersed with the church headed by the “ecumenical patriarch.” So far, this accords with the Dagronian account of a new Byzantine policy toward Syrian Miaphysites in the newly reconquered territories: a hard line against self-evidently foreign heretics.

Yet after working through his version of events, when Alexios comes to announcing the decision against John bar ‘Abdun himself (not heretics or Miaphysites in general), he frames it not as a reaffirmation of the Jacobite’s status as a heretic, a foreign invader, but rather as a surgical intervention. Calling him “the leader of the Jacobites’ heresy,” as mentioned above, Alexios goes on to depict John as stubborn in his error, comparing him, obliquely, to the stubborn Jews whom the prophet Isaiah admonished:¹⁰⁷

since he did not understand what it would mean to understand, and loathed holy speech,¹⁰⁸ and was running, as it were, and contriving arguments against his own salvation as if an iron

παρ<α>συναγωγὰς [corr. Ficker] ἀθέσμους καὶ λιτανείας ἅμα καὶ χειροσ τονίας ἐπιτελεῖν παρὰ πάσαν ἐκκλησιαστικὴν καὶ κανονικὴν ἀκριβείαν καὶ παράδοσιν.

107 The “iron sinew” is a reference to the words of Isaiah when he berates Israel (LXX, Isa 48:4). John Chrysostom (d. 407) quotes these words in an oration against the Jews (*Adversus Judaeos* 5.4 = PG 48:890). Alexios’s use of the passage here not only portrays John as stubborn but also likens him to the “house of Jacob” (Isa 48:1: οἶκος Ἰακώβ); it can only help the allusion that the Jacobites were the followers of another Jacob.

108 Cf. the Acts of the Sixth Ecumenical Council (680–81), ed. in *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum: Series secunda*, ed. R. Riedinger, 3 vols. in 8 (Berlin, 1984–2016), 2:896, lines 20–21 (hereafter *ACO* ser. sec.) = no. 23 (letter of Emperor Constantine IV to Pope Leo II): οὐ γὰρ συνῆκε τοῦ συνιέναι καὶ λόγον ὅσιον ἐβδελύξατο. For συνιήμι with the genitive of the thing (not the person) being understood, see *Lexicon syntacticum* (on what case each verb takes), under Σ, edited from a thirteenth- and a fourteenth-century manuscript by J. A. Cramer, ed., *Anecdota graeca e codd. manuscriptis bibliothecarum Oxoniensium*, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1835–37), 299, line 23: συνιέναι: γενικῇ, συνιέντα τοῦ μυστηρίου.

sinew had hardened his throat¹⁰⁹ (for though he was not ashamed to teach dubiously, he was ashamed to learn well), *like a rotten limb he was synodically cut off by us from the healthy fullness of the church* and sent away by decree of imperial authority to the mountain of Ganos, as it is called, and condemned to irreversible and unapproachable¹¹⁰ confinement.¹¹¹

This surgical imagery, drawing on long-standing conciliar discourse about heretics,¹¹² presupposes that the Jacobite patriarch and his followers had previously been part, even if a bad and rebellious part, of the church. This image corresponds to how historians often think about what earlier councils like the Council of

Chalcedon in 451 were doing when they declared that particular individuals were heretics, and that particular teachings were heresy. In the fifth century, Miaphysites and Dyophysites were part of the same ecclesiastical institution and competed for imperial support for their election to key positions. In a sense, Chalcedon was indeed an attempt to carve off a part of the church and declare it no longer part of the church.

When writing about the situation in the eleventh century, however, historians often view these doctrinal categories as firmer, with some good reason. Byzantine and Jacobite sources alike at least partially agree on what keeps the two parties apart: doctrine and institutional framework. Jacobites had their own patriarch of Antioch; they also had their own bishop of Melitene. So historians have typically followed suit, treating these as two clearly demarcated groups—Byzantine Chalcedonians on the one hand, Jacobite Miaphysites on the other—and have asked how the Byzantine authorities treated the ethnic and religious “minorities” in their empire, like the Syriac-speaking Jacobites.

This makes it all the more striking that Alexios and the synod chose to stress the old way of talking about heretics, envisioning them not as forming an autonomous, free-standing (albeit odious) institution of its own, but rather depicting them as rebels on the inside who needed to be cut out. This is not to suggest that Alexios’s stance is inclusive or tolerant or less self-assured. He knew exactly what he thought was wrong with these heretics and condemned them in no uncertain terms. Indeed, his surgical language is part of a strategy to undermine their legitimacy by writing off their claims to an ecclesiastical lineage of their own. But it does have the effect of cleaving firmly to the idea of a single church that until the 1020s included Syrian Miaphysites like John bar ‘Abdun and his bishops.

Was this a fantasy? An outdated concept mobilized for a strategic purpose? Or even worse, simply a fossilized way of talking about heresy inherited from the past, one more example for detractors to point to of the unoriginality of medieval Byzantine civilization? On the contrary, I would argue that, in some ways, Alexios’s account was a better description of reality than modern historians’ way of talking about such doctrinal disputes.

On the high institutional level, Alexios’s emphasis on the madness of Jacobite prelates calling themselves *patriarchs* in particular obscures how direct a challenge Miaphysites posed to his authority. After all,

109 For this imagery, see the imperial letter cited in the previous note, at *ACO* ser. sec., 2:896, line 24: οὕτως ἐσκληρύνει καὶ νεύρου σιδηροῦν τὸν τράχηλον ἀνετείνατο.

110 Reading ἀπρόσιτον, as Ficker suggests, for ἀπρόϊτον.

111 Ficker, *Erlasse*, 12, line 30–13, line 1 (emphasis added): οὕτε συνήκε τοῦ συνιέναι καὶ λόγον ὅσιον ἐβδελύξατο καὶ ὡσανεὶ τι σιδηροῦν νεῦρον τὸν τράχηλον ἀπεσκληρύνει κατὰ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ὥσπερ τρέχων [corr. Ficker: τρέχων ὥσπερ MS] σωτηρίας καὶ σοφίζόμενος—τὸ γὰρ ἐπισφαλῶς διδάσκειν οὐκ αἰσχυρόμενος τὸ καλῶς μανθάνειν ἡσχύνετο—οἶόν τι σεσηπὸς μέλος συνοδικῶς παρ’ ἡμῶν τοῦ ὑγιαίνοντος ἀπετμήθη τῆς ἐκκλησίας πληρώματος καὶ ψήφῳ τοῦ βασιλικοῦ κράτους εἰς τὸ τοῦ Γάνου καλούμενον ὄρος παραπεμφθεὶς περιορισμὸν κατεκρίθη ἀδιεξόδευτον καὶ ἀπρόϊτον [Ficker conjectures ἀπρόσιτον]. For an independent translation of this passage, see now Gyllenhaal, “Byzantine Melitene,” 225–26.

112 The Acts of the Synod of Constantinople (536) use it to confirm the deposition and condemnation of Anthimos, bishop of Trebizond and then Constantinople, with whom the pope had refused communion and who had entered into communion with the Miaphysite Severus of Antioch (see Menze, *Justinian*, 197–98); §126, ed. E. Schwartz, in *ACO*, 3:180, line 11: ὡς μέλος ἄχρηστον καὶ σεσηπὸς ἀποβληθῆναι τοῦ σώματος τῶν ἁγίων τοῦ θεοῦ ἐκκλησιῶν. See also the imperial letter cited in n. 108 above, at *ACO* ser. sec., 2:895, lines 23–24: συμφέρει γάρ—εὐαγγελικῶς εἰπεῖν—ἵνα ἐν μέλος ἀποδληνται καὶ σέσωσται τῆς ἐκκλησίας ὅλης τὸ πλήρωμα. As alluded to in this passage, the reference is ultimately to Matt 5:30. More broadly, Basil of Caesarea recommends that the sleepy monk who persists in his irritation at being awakened should be “cut off” from the “body” of the community; *Quaestiones* 41 = PG 31:1112, line 3. John Chrysostom uses a similar phrase to justify the exclusion of the sinner from the chorus singing God’s praise (*Cum presbyter fuit ordinatus*, §2, at lines 130–31, ed. A.-M. Malingrey, *Sur le sacerdoce: Dialogue et homélie*, SC 272 [Paris, 1980], 402); and a number of monastic typika decree that the one who does not confess “ought to be cast out of the monastery and cut off like a rotten limb” (ἔδει μὲν τοῦτον καὶ τῆς μονῆς ἐξωθεῖν καὶ οἶόν τι σεσηπὸς ἀποκόπτεται μέλος); e.g., A. I. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, ed., *Noctes Petropolitanae* (St. Petersburg, 1913), 26, line 15.

Chalcedon was the council that elevated the archbishop of Constantinople to the rank of patriarch. By rejecting the council, the Jacobites and other Miaphysites at least implicitly rejected the legitimacy of Alexios's patriarchal title. (The Jacobite patriarch laid claim to the see of Antioch, one of the three primordial sees that had already been a patriarchate before Chalcedon.) When Alexios asks "whence" John bar 'Abdun would have obtained the title of patriarch, he must have known that the Jacobites could, at least starting from their own premises, ask the same thing about him.¹¹³

On a broader social level, Alexios accuses the Jacobites of "taking prisoner . . . the souls of simpler men." It is central to the problem Alexios is seeking to solve that many "simple" people, who may not be involved or interested in the detailed theological debates that divide Miaphysites from Chalcedonians, are affiliating themselves with Jacobites.¹¹⁴ In 1039—over ten years after the trial of John bar 'Abdun—Alexios and the synod issued another synodal decree forbidding "the orthodox" in Melitene from intermarrying with Miaphysites,¹¹⁵ suggesting that such marriages were taking place in significant numbers.¹¹⁶ So while elite

113 For the suggestion that Constantinople would have been motivated by Canon 28 to continue adhering to the Council of Chalcedon, see A. Louth, "Why Did the Syrians Reject the Council of Chalcedon?," in *Chalcedon in Context: Church Councils, 400–700*, ed. R. Price and M. Whitby (Liverpool, 2009), 107–16, at 114. For Old Rome's long-standing resistance to Canon 28, its absence for centuries from western collections of canons, and its relationship to earlier precedent and later conciliar decisions, see J. Herrin, "The Quinisext Council (692) as a Continuation of Chalcedon," in Price and Whitby, *Chalcedon*, 148–68, at 151–56. As Herrin points out (p. 155), the Council of Constantinople of 381 had already asserted that the see of Constantinople was second only to Rome.

114 For the beliefs and attitudes of Christians with limited or no engagement with the finer points of Christian theology, see Tannous, *Making*, esp. chs. 1–2.

115 Grumel, *Regestes*², no. 846; ed. Ficker, *Erlasse*, 28–42 = no. 5.

116 Gyllenhaal ("Byzantine Melitene," 229b–230a) suggests that Alexios's decree "seems especially concerned with high-status unions." Though such a focus on elites might seem plausible, I am not convinced that the decree itself evinces such a focus. Noting that non-elite custom probably no longer included a gap between betrothal and wedding at this time, but that (Constantinopolitan) elite custom did include such a gap, Gyllenhaal points to a passage from Alexios's decree (Ficker, *Erlasse*, 34–35) that declares, as a corollary to the invalidity of "marriage between a believer and an unbeliever," that betrothals and other prenuptial contracts between such parties are also invalid (whether or not the parties had realized that they belonged to different confessions—a sign that perhaps Alexios imagined the decree

Byzantine and Jacobite churchmen could easily have articulated what set their competing institutions apart (including such mundane things as their separate financial structures), such differences might not have been as important to others, especially to the less educated population at large.¹¹⁷ In practice, then, Alexios and the Jacobite patriarch and their respective bishops and priests were competing over the same parishioners, both claiming to represent the one true church, and offering salvation in very similar sounding terms.

Michael of Tanis

Michael of Tanis omits the prehistory and instead takes the division between Chalcedonians and Miaphysites for granted. But, as we shall see, the division he depicts is not exactly what modern scholars have imagined. In describing his visit to Melitene, Michael of Tanis presents us with three categories: the "orthodox Jacobites," the "Chalcedonians," and "the people." The first two are clearly distinct, but how they overlap with the third is not clear. First, Michael and his companion Gabriel, bishop of Šā (Sais, in the Nile Delta), deliver the Coptic pope Christodoulos's synodical letter to John bar 'Abdun's successor, Patriarch John IX. Then John sends his nephew with the Egyptian delegation back to Melitene to give them a tour of the city. "There we saw a number of Melkite Chalcedonians, who had a metropolitan there."¹¹⁸

That seems to be the end of Michael's description of his visit to Melitene; he now describes "the orthodox Jacobites who were in the city," who would visit the "saintly patriarch" at his monastery.¹¹⁹ Finally, Michael relates that the originator of John bar 'Abdun's troubles was "a dissenting bishop [i.e., dissenting from Miaphysite orthodoxy], one who professed two

applying to parties with a limited theological education). To me this suggests not *exclusive* interest in cases where there was a gap between betrothal and marriage, but rather simply interest in all cases of intermarriage, *including* those.

117 Compare this to the situation described by Tannous (*Making*, 197 and n. 89), where he aptly compares confessional leaders' "marginal differentiation" of their confessions from those of rivals to "modern advertising," e.g., for rival brands of toothpaste.

118 HPEC 142, trans. 215: *ra'aynā fihā nafaran min al-malakiyyah al-khalqidūniyyīn wa-lahum matrān fihā*. Note again here the application of the confessional term *malakī* to Christians who are most likely speakers of Greek; see further n. 1 above.

119 HPEC 142, trans. 215: *kāna l-ya'āqibah al-urtuduksiyyīn [sic] alladhīna hum fī l-madinah min kathrat maḥabbatihim li-hādhā l-qiddis al-batrak yamdū<na> ilayhi fī kull waqt ilā l-dayr*.

natures.”¹²⁰ The reason for this Dyophysite bishop’s discontent was envy of John bar ‘Abdun’s popularity,

because [the Dyophysite bishop] used to see the veneration of the people for this saintly father and how they served him on account of the strength of their faith in him, and [the Dyophysite] watched [John bar ‘Abdun] enter his city in the finest and most beautiful manner. But when the aforementioned bishop would go in and out [of the city], no one paid attention to him or asked about him.¹²¹

Here we see “the people” described again as a third category; did they overlap in Michael’s mind with “the orthodox Jacobites” and “the Chalcedonians”? From context, one could almost infer that the first two groups are the Jacobite and Chalcedonian *clergy*, whereas the last designation refers to the laity of the city, or the majority of them. Michael did not portray Melitene as overwhelmingly populated by “Jacobites”; rather he portrayed the Jacobite patriarch as popular with its people. In other words, his description seems to suggest an undifferentiated population and two sets of clergy competing for its support. In any case, dividing “the people” according to their doctrinal affiliation is simply not important for Michael of Tanis’s account: the conflict is not between two socially cohesive groups within the general population, but between two bishops.

The trial is where this changes. In Michael’s account, when a translator bribed by the bishop of Melitene mistranslates John’s statement before the emperor (a ruse to which we will return below), the emperor is angered, “and he cursed [John’s] doctrinal affiliation”¹²² and

his followers,¹²³ and said, ‘You really are dissidents [mukhālifin].’¹²⁴ With these words, the emperor, in Michael’s narrative, affirms that John bar ‘Abdun and, crucially, those who follow him are “dissidents,” distinct from loyal members of the Roman polity. Thus, a difference between two bishops has been generalized to distinguish John and his followers from the rest of the church. In the immediate context, Romanos is clearly referring to John and his delegation, but the curse could easily be generalized to anyone back home in Melitene who adheres to these dissidents’ “doctrinal affiliation.”

Yahyā

Yahyā of Antioch’s brief account reads as follows:¹²⁵

[1.] And it reached the emperor Romanos that the Jacobites had a patriarch [baṭrak] named John [Yūḥannā] living in the region of Mar‘ash, who was called patriarch [baṭriyark] of Antioch and was ordaining metropolitans and bishops for the cities. So he ordered that he be made to appear [in the capital] and with him six of his metropolitans and bishops.¹²⁶

[2.] And he ordered Alexios, patriarch of Constantinople, to summon them to an assembly of those orthodox metropolitans and bishops who happened to be with him, and to exhort [John bar ‘Abdun] to relinquish his doctrine and to acknowledge the seven holy synods, and to

120 HPEC 142, trans. 215: *usqf mukhālif mimman yaqūl bi-tabi’atayn*.

121 HPEC 142, trans. (modified) 216: *li-annahu kāna yarā ijlāl al-nās li-hādhā l-ab al-qiddīs wa-khidmatahum labu li-quwwat imānatihim fihī, wa-yanzur ilā dukhūlihi ilā madīnatihī bi-aḥsan zayy wa-ajmalih, wa-kāna l-usqf al-madhkur yadkhul wa-yakbruj wa-lā yaltafit aḥad ilayhi wa-lā yas’al ‘anhu*.

122 I borrow this apt translation of *madbhab* from Mark Swanson’s talk, “On the Beauty of Texts: Examples from the Christian Arabic Heritage, 8th–13th Centuries CE,” delivered at the symposium *Patrimonio Arabo Cristiano e dialogo Islamo Cristiano*, held in honor of Samir Khalil Samir (Pontificio Istituto Orientale, Rome, 25 May 2018).

123 *majma’*, also the Arabic word for synod, probably refers here to the Jacobite clergy who accompany him, his delegation. But it also suggests that anyone who follows John or gathers (Arabic *yajṭami’*, from the same root as *majma’*) around him is subject to Romanos’s curse.

124 HPEC 144, trans. (modified) 218: *wa-la’annahu wa-la’ana madhbhabahu wa-majma’ahu wa-qāla haqqan innakum mukhālifin* [sic]. See further below, at nn. 183–86.

125 Yahyā, *Histoire* [2], 120–22 (year 419, under Romanos’s reign).

126 *wa-raqiya ilā Rūmānūs al-maliki bi-anna li-l-ya’qūbiyyīna baṭrakan yusammā Yūḥannā, yuqīmu fī baladī Mar‘ash, yusammā bi-Baṭriyark Anṭākyah, wa-yasīmu maṭārīnatan wa-asāqīfatan li-l-mudun, fa-anfadha ashkhaṣahu wa-ashkhaṣa ma’ahu sittatan min maṭārīnatihi wa-asāqīfatihi*. Micheau and Troupeau (ibid., 120, n. 43) observe that Yahyā refers to Chalcedonian patriarchs with the title *baṭriyark*, but to Jacobite patriarchs with the shorter form *baṭrak*. From the present passage, in which Yahyā says that the Jacobite *baṭrak* claimed to be the *baṭriyark* of Antioch, we might modify this slightly to say that the operative distinction is that *baṭriyark* is his term for the legitimate patriarch.

accept those whom they accepted and to reject those whom they rejected.¹²⁷

[3.] And he summoned Nicholas, patriarch of Antioch, to be present with [Alexios], and to join him in exhorting [John], because [Nicholas] was at that time in Constantinople.¹²⁸

[4.] *That heretic refused.* A discussion arose between Alexios the patriarch and those of his¹²⁹ companions who had assembled with him about these matters. And John, the patriarch of the Jacobites, did not agree to retreat from his opinion.¹³⁰

[5.] Some of the commoners gathered and sought to assault him, but they were pushed away from him. When the emperor despaired of [John] ever going back on his doctrine, he exiled him to Kafarbā(?) in the west.¹³¹

127 *wa-taqaddama ilā Alaksiyūs Baṭriyark al-Qusṭantīniyyah fi an yuḥḍirahum bi-mashhadin mimman ittafaqa 'indahu min al-maṭārīnati wa-l-asāqifati l-urthūduksiyyina wa-yukhāṭibahu fi l-rujū' 'an i'iqādihi wa-l-i'ināfi bi-l-sab'ati l-majāmi'i l-muqaddasati wa-qubūli man qabilat-hu wa-dafi man dafa'at-hu.*

128 *wa-stad'ā Nīqūlāws Baṭriyark Anṭākyah li-l-ḥuḍūri ma'ahu, wa-mushāṭakatihī fi l-khiṭābi labu, li-annahu kāna yawma'idhin bi-l-Qusṭantīniyyah.*

129 This probably refers to Alexios's companions, but in theory the syntax allows for it to refer to John bar 'Abdun's companions as well (who are, however, referred to differently below, §6, not as assembling or gathering with John, but sent or summoned with him, i.e., by the emperor). In accordance with their view that the phrase "that heretic" must refer to Nicholas, Micheau and Troupeau (Yaḥyā, *Histoire* [2], 123) understood the phrase to refer to Nicholas's companions.

130 *fa-abā dhālīka l-irīṭuqī wa-jarā bayna Alaksiyūs al-Baṭriyark wa-bayna man ijtama'a ma'ahu min aṣḥābihi khiṭābun fi hādhihi l-ma'ānī, wa-lam yudh'in Yūḥannā baṭraku l-ya'āqibati li-l-inthinā'i 'an ra'yih.* Emphasis added.

131 *wa-jtama'a khalqun min al-'awāmmi wa-hammū bi-l-iqā'i bihi, fa-dufi'ū 'anhu, wa-lammā ayisa l-maliku min 'awdatihī 'an i'iqādihi nafāhu ilā kfrbā (?) bi-l-maghrib.* The place-name *Kfrb* is unknown (see Yaḥyā, *Histoire* [2], 122, n. 47). Yāqūt al-Rūmī (geographer; d. 1229 in Aleppo; see *ET*², s.v. "Yāqūt al-Rūmī") mentions several towns beginning *Kfrb-* (Yāqūt al-Rūmī, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, 5 vols. [Beirut, 1977], 4:468), but none seems to match. Elsewhere in the text, Yaḥyā mentions a town called Kafarbayyā, but its location does not seem to fit the context; Yaḥyā, *Histoire* [1], 98. As Alexios tells it, the place of exile is Ganos in Thrace. Likewise, Michael the Syrian's text refers to it as "Gayos" (*g'yws*) (MichSyr 3:144, 4:564, Ibrahim 567, fol. 286^v, col. 2, line 1 from bottom), as emphasized by an anonymous reviewer. This could easily be a scribal error for "Ganos" (based on

[6.] Three of the six bishops and metropolitans who had been sent with [John] acknowledged [the seven ecumenical councils], but three confirmed their position and so were imprisoned.¹³²

[7.] This John died after three years of exile, and the Jacobites installed another patriarch for themselves after his death. When the emperor Romanos learned of [the new patriarch], he sent someone to bring him in, but [the new patriarch] fled to Diyār Bakr [= Amida] in the lands of Islam.¹³³

This account plainly treats the Jacobites as distinct from the "orthodox" from the beginning (§§1–2), a distinction based on both doctrine and hierarchy (the power to appoint bishops). The social consequences of this distinction, however, seem quite minimal at the beginning: Yaḥyā's account seems to suggest that no one in Constantinople had noticed the presence of the Jacobite patriarch in Byzantine territory previously (§1).

What comes next in Yaḥyā's narrative concerning the Chalcedonian patriarch of Antioch, and Yaḥyā's use of the term "heretic" (§§3–4), is intriguing but textually problematic. The central question is to whom Yaḥyā is referring when he says, "That heretic refused."¹³⁴ On the face of it, this could refer to either the Jacobite patriarch (refusing to acknowledge the councils) or the Chalcedonian patriarch of Antioch (refusing to participate in the proceedings).¹³⁵ It is, however, highly

misreading an exemplar where the *nūn*'s initial stroke was short). On Ganos, see further n. 6 above.

132 *wa-tarafa min al-sittati l-asāqifati wa-l-maṭārīnati l-mushkhaṣina ma'ahu thalāthatun, wa-thabuta thalāthatun 'alā mā hum 'alayhi, fa-hubisū fi l-habs.*

133 *wa-māta Yūḥannā hādihā ba'da thalāthi sinin min nafyihī, wa-aqāma l-ya'āqibatu lahum ba'da mawtihi baṭrakan ghayrahu, fa-lammā 'arafa Rūmānūs al-malik ḥālahu anfadha man yuḥḍirahu, fa-haraba ilā Diyār Bakr min bilādi l-islām.*

134 The demonstrative pronoun *dhālīka* could conceivably be construed as the object of the verb *abā*, but this would not significantly affect the following discussion.

135 There is no consensus interpretation among modern scholars. Marius Canard did not offer an opinion on the matter (perhaps he thought that "heretic" had to refer to the Jacobite) in "Les sources arabes de l'histoire byzantine aux confins des X^e et XI^e siècles," *REB* 19 (1961): 284–314, at 310. Micheau and Troupeau, by contrast, thought that it clearly referred to Patriarch Nicholas of Antioch (Yaḥyā, *Histoire* [2], 123, n. 45). Bartolomeo Pirone's translation interprets it as referring to Nicholas as well; Yaḥyā al-Anṭākī, *Cronache dell'Egitto*

implausible that Yaḥyā, a Chalcedonian, would have referred so casually to the Chalcedonian patriarch of Antioch as a heretic. In medieval Christian usage, the term would seem far more applicable (from a Chalcedonian perspective) to someone who refused to accept the seven ecumenical councils than to someone who declined to participate in synodal proceedings ostensibly meant to examine *whether* a particular bishop was a heretic.

The Arabic connector used at the start of §4 (*fa-*), which typically implies a change of subject, could help explain why Yaḥyā would have felt it necessary to add “that heretic” here.¹³⁶ The subject of the immediately preceding clause was Patriarch Nicholas, but this was a subordinate (and semantically parenthetical) clause, so we should also note that just before it came a main clause whose subject was the emperor, who “summoned Nicholas.” Who, then, was the new subject signaled by *fa-*? Often Arabic narratives omit the subject in such instances—for example, when there are two main protagonists (rulers, generals, rival claimants to the throne, etc.), making it obvious who the new subject is. But this particular context would have allowed any of the preceding actors mentioned—Alexios or John, or possibly even Nicholas—to be the new subject. Furthermore, both Nicholas and John would make sense *semantically*, since both are being asked to do something. And so I would suggest that Yaḥyā, after writing *fa-abā*, added a clarifying reference to specify the subject: “that heretic.” This solution maintains good style by avoiding repeating the name of someone who has just been mentioned,

while making perfectly clear, at least in his mind, whom he meant: the only person mentioned who, from a Chalcedonian perspective, could conceivably be called a heretic.

The view that Yaḥyā meant to say that Nicholas was refusing to participate in the proceedings has been supported with reference both to the Syriac Disciple’s Vita, which reports that the patriarch of Antioch refused to condemn John bar ‘Abdun,¹³⁷ and to the corroboration provided by Alexios’s surviving decree, confirming his recent condemnation of the Jacobite patriarch, which was signed by a new patriarch of Antioch, Elias: if the first document had conspicuously lacked the signature of the patriarch of Antioch, a new incumbent of the see who was willing to sign probably explains why Alexios felt the need to issue a confirmation so soon.¹³⁸ This interpretation of Yaḥyā could be admitted without having Yaḥyā call Nicholas a heretic, by emending “the heretic” (*al-irīṭūqī*) to “the Antiochene” (*al-Anṭākī*).¹³⁹ The line in question would then read, “That Antiochene [i.e., Nicholas] refused,” and the same logic would apply, namely, that Yaḥyā sought to specify which of the preceding actors was the subject of *abā* by referring to Nicholas using a *nisbah* (relational epithet) derived from his see. Still, the emendation is rather implausible.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, the narrative now becomes oddly fixated on Nicholas; rather than discussing John bar ‘Abdun, as intended, the synod ends up discussing Nicholas’s refusal to participate,

fātīmide e dell'impero bizantino, 937–1033, trans. B. Pirone (Milan, 1998), 342. Vest (*Geschichte*, 1211, n. 4) is more cautious, stating that it could refer to either one. Most recently, Gyllenhaal (“Byzantine Melitene,” 225, n. 109) follows Micheau and Troupeau in viewing Nicholas as the referent.

136 An anonymous reviewer pointed out that the Arabic connector *fa-* that introduces the clause indicates, in contexts such as this one, that the subject of the clause that follows is different from the subject of the preceding clause. In my view, this is not quite enough to rule out (on syntactical grounds alone) the possibility that Nicholas was the intended subject of the verb *abā* (to refuse) and the referent of “that heretic,” as the *fa-* could theoretically indicate a change of subject relative to the subject of the previous main clause, namely, Emperor Romanos, thus leaving both possibilities open in theory. In any case, as will become clear, scrutinizing the syntax along the lines suggested by the reviewer’s observation has helped me to explain why Yaḥyā might have thought it necessary to add the word “heretic” as a way of clarifying that he meant to refer to John bar ‘Abdun.

137 MichSyr 3:141, 4:563, Ibrahim 566, fol. 286^r, col. 2, lines 4–7; cited in Yaḥyā, *Histoire* [2], 123, n. 45.

138 Grumel, *Regestes*², no. 840; Gyllenhaal, “Byzantine Melitene,” 225a.

139 *nṭ’ky* > *rt’qy*, which could have been read as an alternate spelling of (and thus emended by a scribe to) *irīṭūqī*, the foreign loanword for heretic (which could also be spelled *irīṭīqī*; see G. Graf, *Verzeichnis arabischer kirchlicher Termini*, 2nd ed., CSCO 147 [Louvain, 1954], 7).

140 The emendation would be more plausible if we were to posit that the original text read *al-Anṭāqī* (*qāf* instead of *kāf*). This unusual spelling is used in the entries “al-Anṭākī” in *EP*² (where *k* = *q*) and “al-Anṭāqī, Yaḥyā b. Sa’īd” in *EP*³. Furthermore, the latter entry, by Micheau, explicitly asserts that Yaḥyā spelled his own *nisbah* this way in the introduction to his historical work, but does not provide a specific reference. In Yaḥyā’s introduction in the published edition (*Histoire* [1], 7), Yaḥyā’s *nisbah* appears in the title, where it is, however, spelled *al-Anṭākī* (the usual spelling), with no variants listed. The one manuscript I have been able to consult (in a digital reproduction) spells it the same way: Paris ar. 291 (seventeenth/eighteenth century), fol. 82^v (<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b11004799p>).

to which “these matters” would have to refer if *fa-abā* meant that Nicholas “refused.” This, moreover, makes the next clause about John sound like an afterthought.

There are then three scenarios: First, *Yahyā calls John a heretic*. This would be the least surprising and is, in my view, the most plausible. It fits the context, fits the syntax, and accords best with the Byzantine (and neighboring) Christian understanding of heresy as belief in and propagation of false doctrines.¹⁴¹ Second, and least plausibly, *Yahyā calls Nicholas a heretic*. This would be very surprising; if authentic, this reading would suggest that Yahyā promoted the extreme view that mere sympathy for heretics made one a heretic as well. Or third, *Yahyā simply refers to Nicholas as the Antiochene*.

The first scenario results in a narrative that treats John bar ‘Abdun’s status as a heretic as self-evident from the beginning, needing only to be discovered and rooted out, not argued for. In this it is consistent with Alexios’s own account, but, in its brevity, has none of the nuance of Alexios’s account.

In the second and third scenarios, Yahyā would be the only Chalcedonian source to affirm explicitly that Nicholas had refused to condemn the Jacobite claimant to his own see.¹⁴² It would also result in a narrative in which there was serious ambivalence, even among the highest-ranking Chalcedonian bishops, about whether the doctrinal differences with the Jacobites should lead to punitive measures against bishops—to say nothing of the Jacobite population at large.¹⁴³ Indeed, as Gyllenhaal argues, Nicholas’s apparent dissent could be correlated with the dissenting “notables” in the Disciple’s Vita, who walk out on the proceedings in disgust, to suggest broader Constantinopolitan elite

resistance to Alexios’s approach to the Jacobites.¹⁴⁴ While Gyllenhaal adopts the second interpretation (that Yahyā calls Nicholas a heretic),¹⁴⁵ I believe his broader argument about the disagreement among Chalcedonian Christians and Constantinopolitans still stands even without Yahyā; the absence of the patriarch of Antioch from Alexios’s first decree’s list of subscriptions, and the presence of a new incumbent of the see in the subsequent decree, really do speak volumes. Furthermore, the presence of dissenters in Constantinople would accord with the fragmentary evidence that there may also have been Antiochian supporters of Alexios’s approach even before Nicholas’s successor was elevated to the Antiochian patriarchate.¹⁴⁶ Perhaps the division was not between imperial center and periphery, but within the Byzantine ruling elite itself.

However one reads the problematic beginning of §4, the remainder of the narrative portrays a doctrinal divide that grows in social extent over the course of the narrative (just as in Michael of Tanis). Yahyā’s report that “some of the commoners” of Constantinople spontaneously sought to vent their rage against John bar ‘Abdun in the midst of the proceedings (§5) seems calculated to suggest John’s manifest guilt, so clear that even commoners see it, and to portray Emperor Romanos and Patriarch Alexios as clement. But it also results in an account wherein a dispute between clerics and bishops has become one in which the whole population participates.

Disciple’s Vita

As the Disciple’s Vita tells it, one day the Chalcedonian metropolitan of Melitene, fed up with the saint’s miracles, went to Constantinople to complain that “the magician” was “drawing even Greeks unto himself.”¹⁴⁷ Michael’s hagiographical purposes (and

141 See above, n. 38.

142 In the Disciple’s Vita, the emperor offers John bar ‘Abdun the see of Antioch; MichSyr 3:143, 4:564, Ibrahim 567; and see Todt, “Region” [Habil.], 662; Todt, *Dukat*, 324. Todt suggests that Romanos might have contemplated deposing Nicholas to replace him with a capitulating John bar ‘Abdun, but this strikes me as unlikely. Alexios’s explicit policy in the decree was to allow capitulating bishops to keep their ecclesiastical title but not their see when a Chalcedonian incumbent already exists. Even without such extreme measures, a charismatic rival might have seemed problematic.

143 Michael the Syrian’s chronicle gives the impression that Jacobite patriarchs tended to have good relations with their Chalcedonian counterparts in Antioch, both Patriarch Athanasios (d. 1002–3) and John bar ‘Abdun; see MichSyr 3:135, 4:559, Ibrahim 562 (Athanasios); and above, n. 49.

144 Gyllenhaal, “Byzantine Melitene,” 224–25.

145 See above, n. 135.

146 If Ibrāhīm ibn Yūḥannā the *protospatharios* was, as seems likely, one of the signatories of the condemnation of John bar ‘Abdun; S. Noble, “A Byzantine Bureaucrat and Arabic Philosopher: Ibrāhīm ibn Yūḥannā al-Anṭākī and His Translation of *On the Divine Names* 4.18–35,” in *Caught in Translation: Studies on Versions of Late Antique Christian Literature*, ed. M. Toca and D. Batovici (Leiden, 2020), 267–312, at 269–70; and now Gyllenhaal, “Byzantine Melitene,” 212, n. 30.

147 MichSyr 3:140, 4:562, Ibrahim 565, fol. 285^v, col. 2, lines 17–18: *haw ḥarāšā afl-yawnāye hā nāged lwāteḥ*. Cf. John 12:32, *eged kulnāš*

those of his source) are clearly advanced by making John bar 'Abdun's appeal extend outside of the Syrian community. Yet the very terms in which the Syriac account puts this praise in the mouth of John bar 'Abdun's antagonist portrays ethnolinguistic categories as more important than doctrinal affiliation in Melitene: John bar 'Abdun was attracting *Greeks*. Perhaps we are to assume that "Greeks" are Chalcedonians, just as "Syrians" and "Armenians" are often Miaphysites, but the text does not say so. The holy man's appeal to people of more than one *ethnicity* is, in the narrative, what drives the metropolitan's envy (or at least it is what he believes will persuade the emperor). Moreover, not even ethnic categories are presented as constituting social groups: Greeks could appreciate the Syrian wonder-worker in their midst.

At first the metropolitan's complaints fell on deaf ears, as the emperors Basil and Constantine seemed unconcerned that a popular Syrian churchman lived in the mountains near Melitene.¹⁴⁸ But the newly crowned Emperor Romanos listened because he and the metropolitan had been schoolmates.¹⁴⁹ While this claim serves the hagiographer's interests, by portraying John's antagonists as self-dealing, good old boys, it is also plausible enough.¹⁵⁰ The Disciple's Vita mentions no ideological motivation behind the emperor's actions, missing an opportunity to label John's antagonist as heretical or doctrinally suspect.

The text continues with the *kr̥ites* Chrysoberges' reluctance to arrest the patriarch. Only when a traitor informed the messengers from Constantinople of John bar 'Abdun's whereabouts were these messengers able to arrest the patriarch at the Bārid monastery.¹⁵¹ Again, this fits the text's purposes suspiciously well (we are presented with a comparison between John's arrest and that of Jesus of Nazareth), but the result is a narrative in which the doctrinal division between John bar 'Abdun and Chrysoberges was not decisive.

The other three narrators omit this episode entirely. For Michael of Tanis, it would have disrupted his narrative's image of a clear, preexisting elite-level social division along doctrinal lines.¹⁵² If Chrysoberges really was as reluctant as the Disciple's Vita contends, this would have been additionally embarrassing for Alexios, who wished to present a united Chalcedonian front against the Jacobites.

The Disciple's Vita reports that all of Melitene lamented the patriarch's coerced departure, "not only our people" but also "Armenians" and even "Greek Chalcedonians who were in the city," all of whom crowded around to receive his blessing one last time.¹⁵³ Here, again, we are presented with a community in Melitene not socially divided by doctrine or ethnicity, but united in love for the saintly patriarch. Once in Constantinople, the Vita claims (as does Yaḥyā, in two of the three interpretations discussed above), the patriarch of Antioch abstained from the proceedings against John bar 'Abdun, insisting that the Jacobite patriarch and his bishops were Christians, so that it was "not necessary for us to interrogate them."¹⁵⁴ Even some of the highest-ranking Chalcedonian clergy, we are meant to conclude, refused to call Miaphysites heretics.

The Disciple's Vita portrays the proceedings themselves as violent, repeatedly comparing John's trial to that of Jesus. The metropolitan of Melitene is a new Caiaphas.¹⁵⁵ During the first day of questioning, the metropolitan strikes John bar 'Abdun, and the "notables" walk out.¹⁵⁶ The account thus presents us with an effort to carve out a social division between Chalcedonian bishops and Miaphysite bishops through physical violence. But it depicts the Byzantine elite as reluctant to permit this group-constituting violence. Together, these two aspects of the portrait presuppose the absence of a preexisting social division along doctrinal lines.

lwāt'; quoted by J. Payne Smith, ed., *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary: Founded upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith* (Oxford, 1903; Winona Lake, IN, 1998), 327. Thus, the Vita has the Chalcedonian metropolitan inadvertently liken John bar 'Abdun to Jesus.

148 Cf. the account of Alexios, where the metropolitan appeals to these emperors but is not so squarely rejected (Ficker, *Erlasse*, 11).

149 MichSyr 3:140, 4:562, Ibrahim 565, fol. 285^v.

150 See above, nn. 70–72.

151 MichSyr 3:140–41, 4:562–63, Ibrahim 565–66, fols. 285^v–286^r.

152 HPEC 143, trans. 216.

153 MichSyr 3:141, 4:563, Ibrahim 566, fol. 286^r, col. 1, lines 25–30: *law balhūd 'amā dīlan abīlīn 'waw 'al fāršāneh, ellā āf armnāye yatirā'it, w-āfhenon yawnāye ka'lqidūnāye d-bāh ba-mdī'itā*.

154 MichSyr 3:141, 4:563, Ibrahim 566, fol. 286^r, col. 2, line 7: *lā ālšā d-na'qeb enon*.

155 MichSyr 3:141, 4:563, Ibrahim 566, fol. 286^r.

156 MichSyr 3:142, 4:564, Ibrahim 567, fol. 286^v, col. 1, line 7: *rīšāne*.

John and his entourage are interrogated by the emperor and the metropolitan in pairs, and then individually, and three bishops are eventually tricked by the metropolitan into signing an affidavit in which they agree to “do obeisance” to the emperor and Patriarch Alexios—which the emperor and the metropolitan later use to offer them a choice between anathematizing Severus and Dioskoros at the emperor’s command or being put to death for perjury.¹⁵⁷ The suggestion here is that the Miaphysite bishops were perfectly willing to affirm loyalty to the emperor, a Chalcedonian, and even to the Chalcedonian patriarch of Constantinople. The Jacobites, we are meant to understand, were exemplary imperial citizens.

Meanwhile, when the Chalcedonian metropolitan, under pressure from the emperor to show results, abuses and spits on John bar ‘Abdun in an attempt to provoke the Jacobite patriarch to anathematize him, the Jacobite patriarch refuses to speak ill of the metropolitan.¹⁵⁸ In this account, then, even the *ecclesiastical* consequences of doctrinal difference are not taken for granted. The enactment of ecclesiastical and social division requires violence; even the three Jacobites who renounce Miaphysitism do so only under threat of death.¹⁵⁹

Convergences

Despite being arrayed on opposite sides of the inter-confessional conflict that John bar ‘Abdun’s trial has been taken to represent, the four narratives converge, often surprisingly, in how they make sense of the events. I will focus here on three aspects: the pains that elites needed to take to enact and maintain confession-based social division; a studied lack of interest in someone who might have been expected to play a major role, the Jacobite bishop of Melitene; and the consistent portrayal of Emperor Romanos as a just emperor.

157 MichSyr 3:143–44, quote at 3:143, 4:564, Ibrahim 567, fol. 286^v, col. 2, line 7: *tesgdun*.

158 MichSyr 3:143–44, 4:564, Ibrahim 567, fol. 286^v. The Vita explains that if John bar ‘Abdun had anathematized Chalcedonians, then John, metropolitan of Melitene, might have been able to convince the emperor to put the Jacobite to death.

159 MichSyr 3:144, 4:565, Ibrahim 568, fol. 287^r.

The Project of Group Making

As the trial ends, Alexios is most concerned with clearing away any ambiguity in the boundary between the two newly constituted social groups by sorting out what to do with those Jacobite bishops who, being “of mind and soul receptive to goodness . . . , gazed up at the light of truth.”¹⁶⁰ Drawing on the eighth canon of the Council of Nicaea, which he quotes in full,¹⁶¹ he concludes that these bishops should be treated like repentant Cathars: if there is no “orthodox” bishop sharing their sees, then they may keep their bishoprics, but if an “orthodox” bishop already exists, then it is up to that bishop whether he will continue to share episcopal rank with the repentant heretic or have him demoted to the rank of priest. This ruling (as issued in the fourth century and reissued here in the eleventh) acknowledges that prior to the judgment, “heretical” bishops were *de facto* bishops of their sees. It also treats Miaphysitism as a heresy comparable to the dualism of “those who called themselves pure [καθαρούς],”¹⁶² whose theology was much further from Byzantine orthodoxy than was Jacobite orthodoxy. Alexios’s ruling is an attempt to redefine the social and administrative landscape, depriving bishops, at least *de jure*, of their bishoprics—and thus also of their roles as community leaders, arbiters, and managers of property.¹⁶³

Michael of Tanis’s account of John bar ‘Abdun’s exile makes plain how much effort it took to construct social groups out of doctrinal division and maintain them on a daily basis. The monks at the monastery spit on the Jacobite patriarch and curse him every day.¹⁶⁴

160 Ficker, *Erlasse*, 13, line 13–14, line 1: Ἐπεὶ δὲ τινες τῶν ὑπ’ αὐτὸν ἐπισκόπων εὐπαραδέκτου πρὸς τὸ καλὸν εὐρεθέντες γνώμης τε καὶ ψυχῆς . . . πρὸς τὸ τῆς ἀληθείας ἀνέβλεψαν φῶς. Cf. above, n. 92.

161 Ibid., 14, line 21–15, line 11.

162 Ibid., 14, lines 21–22 (quoting Nicaea): τῶν ὀνομαζόντων . . . ἑαυτοὺς καθαρούς.

163 Stewardship of property was a major concern for bishops, not only in practice but in their self-representation; see, e.g., K. Sessa, *The Formation of Papal Authority in Late Antique Italy: Roman Bishops and the Domestic Sphere* (New York, 2012). This is confirmed by the great stress upon John bar ‘Abdun’s just handling of money in both Michael of Tanis and the Disciple’s Vita; and, indeed, by Alexios’s own use of the language of managerial stewardship (quite typical in Byzantine canon law) in justifying his (in his view) lenient approach to the repentant Syrian bishops: οὕτω περὶ τούτων οἰκονομήσαι δεῖν ἐγνώμεν . . . (Ficker, *Erlasse*, 14, lines 7–8).

164 HPEC 145, trans. 219.

This ritual is enforced by “a Melkite hermit” nearby,¹⁶⁵ who “placed excommunication upon” whomsoever of the monks refused to enlist his voice and his spittle in the daily task of reinforcing the social division.¹⁶⁶ The task was to isolate not only the patriarch through maltreatment, but his followers too. “There was in Constantinople a man who loved Abba John”—this Syrian, prevented from visiting John in his place of exile, is caught smuggling an innocent note to his imprisoned, gout-stricken patriarch in the monastery, and is beaten for it.¹⁶⁷

Hearing about this, John bar ‘Abdun, speaking in secret with his disciple (*tilmīdh*) who attended him in exile, foretells his own imminent death, the end of all these tribulations.¹⁶⁸ At this point, the greatest concern is to prevent John’s body, when he dies, from being buried among Chalcedonians—“Do not bury me in the cemetery of the heretics,” John tells his disciple.¹⁶⁹ This reciprocated group construction is a far cry from John’s refusal to reject communion with Chalcedonians, as narrated by the Disciple’s Vita. Despite the disciple’s doubts, “God is able to do anything,”¹⁷⁰ and so John’s request is fulfilled: the monks prevent the emperor’s “messengers [*rusul*]” from burying him at the monastery, saying, “Take this heretic from the midst of the orthodox,” and so they bury him “far away” in a “rocky place.”¹⁷¹ The Chalcedonian monks and the Jacobites could at least agree that the remains of the patriarch who professed one nature should be kept far from Chalcedonian bones.

The Jacobite patriarch’s successor would take refuge outside of Byzantine territory. John bar ‘Abdun himself, according to Michael of Tanis, instructs his disciple before his death, “I charge you to tell the people not to let the one who comes after me dwell in the lands of the Romans, but rather to dwell in Amida [a.k.a.

Diyār Bakr] or in the city of Edessa.”¹⁷² Yaḥyā reports that John bar ‘Abdun’s successor “fled to Diyār Bakr in the lands of Islam” when Emperor Romanos sought him (§7), and Michael the Syrian likewise reports that the new patriarch, Dionysios, was chased out of Melitene to Amida in Arab territory when “the Chalcedonians who were in Melitene” complained—quite a different role for Melitene’s Chalcedonians from the one the Disciple’s Vita had depicted.¹⁷³

All this division took considerable elite effort, as Alexios’s 1039 decree against intermarriage between Chalcedonian and Miaphysite Christians indicates.¹⁷⁴ The decree is universal in its terms, but, as before, the Chalcedonian metropolitan John is named as the instigator who brought the issue before the synod. Far from indicating local ethnic or religious “tensions” festering in Melitene,¹⁷⁵ it suggests quite the opposite: Miaphysites and Chalcedonians in Melitene, a decade after the trial of John bar ‘Abdun, still saw nothing wrong with marrying each other.

Erasing the Miaphysite Bishop of Melitene

Our four narrators make a point of saying that the dispute was between John, the Chalcedonian metropolitan of Melitene, and the Jacobite patriarch, John bar ‘Abdun. The dispute is oddly asymmetrical. After all, the Jacobite patriarch claimed the see of Antioch, not Melitene; he did not even reside in the metropolitan’s city. But the Syriac *Chronicle of 1234* preserves a subtly but crucially different version of the dispute’s origin: “In the reign of Romanos, enmity arose between John, the Chalcedonian metropolitan of Melitene, and Ignatios,

165 Again, clearly not an Arabic speaker; see above, n. 1.

166 HPEC 145, trans. 219: *ḥabīs min al-malakiyyah . . . wa-ja’ala ‘alayhim ḥirm<an> in lam yaf’alū dhālik kull yawm*.

167 HPEC 145, trans. 220: *wa-kāna bi-l-Qusṭanṭīniyyah insān yuḥibb Anbā Yūḥannā . . .*

168 HPEC 145–46, trans. 220.

169 HPEC 146, trans. 220: *fa-lā tadfinnī fī madfan al-barāṭīqab*.

170 HPEC 146, trans. (modified) 221: *u’min anna llāh qādir ‘alā kull shay’*.

171 HPEC 146, trans. 221: *imḏū bi-hādhā l-barāṭīqī min wast al-urtuduksiyyin . . . mawḏi ‘shakhr{ab} . . . ba’id ‘anhum*.

172 HPEC 146, trans. (modified) 220: *fa-anā ūṣika an taqūl li-l-sha’b lā yada’ alladhī ya’tī ba’dī yaskun fī bilād al-Rūm bal yaskun fī Amid aw madīnat al-Rubā*. Edessa was then still outside Byzantine control, though not for long, only until 1032; Ostrogorsky, *History*², 322 = §5.1.

173 MichSyr 3:147, 4:566, Ibrahim 569, fol. 287^v, col. 1, line 1: *ka’lqāḏūnāye da-b-Mēlītīnī*.

174 See above, n. 115.

175 This was the interpretation of Vryonis, “Byzantium,” 170. Viewing the trial of John bar ‘Abdun as the first salvo of renewed Byzantine persecution, Vryonis interpreted the synodal decree against intermarriage of Chalcedonians and Miaphysites (and the new related regulation of inheritance) as a sign that “the situation between Greeks and Syrians in the city of Melitene had become [very] tense.”

the city's metropolitan."¹⁷⁶ Suddenly the whole affair takes on a new meaning. In this version, a dispute arose between *two bishops competing for the same see*—a much more familiar scenario.¹⁷⁷ The Jacobite patriarch was only brought into the dispute afterward, either when he interceded on Ignatios's behalf or when the metropolitan John raised the stakes of his complaint before the authorities in Constantinople by focusing on the Jacobite *patriarch*, no mere bishop.

Why then do our four main narrators make no mention of it? Each, as it turns out, had good reason to deemphasize the dispute between the two metropolitans. Alexios, patriarch of Constantinople, was keen to portray himself as destroying the root of the Jacobite heresy, the head of the "headless" church, rather than resolving some local dispute between bishops. With universal ambitions, he cast his decisions in universal terms. Yaḥyā, in his brief notice, does not even cast the affair as a dispute at all, and mentions neither of the squabbling metropolitans; instead, Emperor Romanos takes the initiative. Meanwhile, the Miaphysite sources (the Disciple's Vita and Michael of Tanis's excursus on John bar 'Abdun) are biographical accounts of the Jacobite patriarch's life and miracles. They are understandably focused on the events in question only insofar as they pertained to John bar 'Abdun's life and death.

But these two Miaphysite sources had an even more compelling reason not to cast the Jacobite metropolitan of Melitene, Ignatios bar Athunus, as a champion of the Jacobite cause: he was one of the three bishops who had capitulated and accepted Chalcedon. Just before the Disciple's Vita begins, Michael the Syrian eliminates the possibility of casting Ignatios bar Athunus in a leading role when he writes that in the time of John bar 'Abdun, "Ignatios bar Athunus was ordained to Melitene, he who later became Chalcedonian"; Ignatios bar Qiqi, the bishop of Tagrit who became a Muslim, is mentioned in the same

breath.¹⁷⁸ Thus, Michael's chronicle frames Ignatios bar Athunus from the beginning as an example of what happens to those who abandon the true faith in hopes of personal gain.¹⁷⁹ When Ignatios and the other two capitulate, the Disciple's Vita relates that "one of them, Ignatios of Melitene, who is Bar Athunus, was shattered in those days by bitter regret, and died," while the other two bishops managed to escape to Syria "and ended their lives in penitence."¹⁸⁰

A Just Emperor

None of the four narrators casts Romanos as the villain in the trial, even though they tend to ascribe to him a high degree of agency, and agree that the decision to exile John bar 'Abdun was ultimately his. By making the emperor the victim of a ruse perpetrated by the Chalcedonian metropolitan of Melitene, Michael of Tanis preserves the emperor's reputation, and so makes it easier for Miaphysites to remain loyal both to their exiled patriarch and to the emperor.¹⁸¹ In a possible echo of the same tradition, the Disciple's Vita twice mentions corrupt translators briefly—but in neither case blames the emperor's decision on a false translation, nor are there any further details about what speech they changed.¹⁸²

178 MichSyr 3:137, 4:560, Ibrahim 563, fol. 284^v, col. 1, lines 7–10: *ettasrah Igna'tyūs l-Mēlītīnī, haw d-bāraken huwā ka'lqidūnāyā*. For Bar Qiqi, see A. M. Roberts, "Being a Sabian at Court in Tenth-Century Baghdad," *JAOS* 137.2 (2017): 253–77, at 276.

179 If, indeed, the original Disciple's Vita quoted at length by Michael the Syrian traced the trial to an original dispute between two rival metropolitans of Melitene (see above, n. 176), it makes sense that Michael's chronicle would omit it in an intentional attempt to harmonize the narrative of the Disciple's Vita with the chronicle's prior foreshadowing of Ignatios's capitulation.

180 MichSyr 3:144–45, 4:565, Ibrahim 568, fol. 287^r, col. 2, lines 7–12: "*w-haw had menhon Igna'tyūs d-Mēlītīnī d-hu bar Atūnūs b-hon b-yawmātā ba-twātā marīrtā pqa' w-mīt*"; "*b-tyābūtā shallem hayehon*."

181 For this emphasis on loyalty to the emperor, see now Gyllenhaal, "Byzantine Melitene," 224.

182 In both cases, the Chalcedonian metropolitan of Melitene instigates the foul play. One translator who maliciously manipulated the speech of Syrian Miaphysites is named as Theodore of Melitene, a Chalcedonian (mentioned above, n. 58). A Chalcedonian bishop (named John) "rebuked him" (*akseh*) for it; MichSyr 3:142, 4:563, Ibrahim 566, fol. 286^r, col. 2, lines 8 from bottom–4 from bottom. The other, Peter Šrāfāy / Šarrāfi ("Goldsmith"? or "Money-Changer," as suggested by Vest, *Geschichte*, 1216, n. 1) of Melitene, is said to have

176 *Chronicle of 1234*, ed. Chabot, 2:283, trans. Aboune, 213 (cited by Vest, *Geschichte*, 1198): *kad emar da-b-malkūtā d-Romanos neplat senē'tā bēt lūa'niyūs mītrū(pūlītā) kalqidūnāyā d-Mēlītīnī l-Igna'tyūs mītrū(pūlītā) dīlāh da-mdīnā*. If this is a (possibly adapted) quotation from the same vita of John bar 'Abdun that Michael the Syrian cites (see above, at n. 32), then it is suggestive that Michael the Syrian leaves out this line; see further n. 179 below.

177 For rival bishops in the fifth century, see F. Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire: Power and Belief under Theodosius II (408–450)* (Berkeley, 2006), 150.

In Michael of Tanis's account, Emperor Romanos asks John bar 'Abdun to acknowledge Chalcedon, to which the Jacobite patriarch replies,

Our lord emperor, may the Lord preserve your empire and your authority! He knows that I do not cease from prayer and supplication for your powerful empire, as the Holy Scriptures command us, "so that our life may be at ease and in peace" [1 Tim 2:2]. Your authority doesn't have the right to force anyone to forsake his religion—just as we have two kings, the king of Abyssinia and the king of Nubia, and they do not force any of the people of your religion who dwell among them to change their faith.¹⁸³

He concludes with a prayer for the emperor and for God to "preserve each of us according to what he has made clear to each."¹⁸⁴ But the metropolitan had bribed the interpreter, who adds after "we have two kings" the words "greater than you" (*a ʒam [sic] minka*). Romanos is furious, and the case is decided. Michael of Tanis clearly expected that his audience would see the plausibility of such a ruse working. Details of theology were not the emperor's main concern, Michael of Tanis implies; what he wanted to assess was John's loyalty.¹⁸⁵

been struck dead by God as punishment, "like his predecessor" (suggesting that Theodore too had died as a result of his dishonesty); MichSyr 3:143, 4:564, Ibrahim 567, fol. 286^v, col. 1, lines 13 from bottom–10 from bottom: *aʿk haw da-qdāmau*^{hy}. These two examples were recently pointed out by Jan van Ginkel in a message to the Hugoye listserv, 22 January 2021. See also Vest, *Geschichte*, 1214–16.

183 HPEC 144, trans. (modified) 218 (with identification of the biblical quotation at 218, n. 2): *yā sayyidnā al-malik, al-rabb yahfāz mamlakataka wa-sulṭānaka, wa-huwa ya lam annanī mā atruk al-ṣalāt wa-l-duʿā li-mamlakatika l-qābiṭab, kamā amaratnā al-kutub al-muqaddasah ḥattā takūn ḥayātunā fī daʿah wa-salāmah, walaysa yajūz li-sulṭānika an yulzim aḥad<an> bi-an yatrak dīnahu, kamā anna lanā malikayn, wa-humā malik al-Ḥabashah wa-malik al-Nūbah, wa-mā yulzimū [sic] aḥad<an> min ahl millatikum al-muqīmīn ʿindahum an yantaqilū ʿan imānatihim*. Quoted by Gyllenhaal, "Byzantine Melitene," 224 and n. 105.

184 *wa-yahfāz kull minnā bi-mā qad {ta}bayyanahu lahu*. Emending *tbynh* to *bayyanahu* is my suggestion. The published translation ("to preserve all of us according as has been revealed to him") suggests an alternate emendation: *tabayyana{hu}*.

185 This is consistent with how Michael of Tanis phrases the metropolitan's initial accusation that prompts the emperor to summon John bar 'Abdun to Constantinople in the first place (HPEC 142, trans., modified, 216): "In your empire there is a man, a patriarch, who

Strikingly, this Miaphysite narrative implies that the emperor's judgment that the Jacobite patriarch and his followers were dissidents rested on distorted information. This suggests that if not for the ruse, the emperor would have recognized the legitimacy of the Jacobites as members of Roman society.¹⁸⁶

Michael the Syrian's own running narrative portrayed Emperor Romanos in quite different terms, setting our four earlier narratives in stark relief. Soon after the end of the Disciple's Vita, he recounts (presumably following his main source for this period, Ignatios of Melitene)¹⁸⁷ that "Romanos died suddenly because the Lord was not pleased with the persecution he had stirred up against the faithful."¹⁸⁸ The Disciple's Vita, at least as preserved by Michael the Syrian, has no such explicit condemnation of the emperor. Michael (again presumably based on Ignatios of Melitene) begins the chapter that includes the Disciple's Vita with an account of Roman military failure, due to the choice of the "tyrannical Greeks" to "persecute Christians" in a return to "their ancient ways";¹⁸⁹ a famine; and a concise and tendentious summary of the trial of John bar 'Abdun itself:

In this time, the tyrannical Chalcedonians stirred up a persecution against the orthodox in Melitene and the region around it. By force they brought my lord patriarch John bar 'Abdun and his bishops to Constantinople, and they sent them into exile without mercy, as discussed in the *History of My Lord Saint John*.¹⁹⁰

has become arrogant, and the people obey him more than you" (*fī mamlakatika rajul batrak qad taṭāwala wa-l-nās yuṭī ʿu-na>hu akthar minka*).

186 Likewise, the Disciple's Vita casts the emperor as judge, with the Chalcedonian metropolitan as the vicious prosecutor who tries his patience; MichSyr 3:143, 4:564, Ibrahim 567.

187 Not to be confused with Ignatios bar Athunus. See above, nn. 31 and 44.

188 MichSyr (bk. 13, ch. 7) 3:146, 4:565, Ibrahim 568, fol. 287^r, col. 1, lines 9 from bottom–6 from bottom: *Romanos malkā mīt men šely, meṭul d-maryā lā eṣṭbi ba-rdūfyā haw d-aʿir ʿal mhayymne*.

189 MichSyr 3:136, 4:560, Ibrahim 563, fol. 284^v, col. 2, lines 9–15: "*yaunāye ṭālūme*"; "*rdūfyā da-kristiyyāne*"; "*l-ʿiyāde ʿatiqe*."

190 MichSyr 3:137, 4:560, Ibrahim 563, fol. 284^v, col. 3, lines 8–17: *b-hānā zabnā aqīm^w rdūfyā ʿal triṣay šū(bhā) kaʿlqūdūnāye ṭālūme b-Mēlītīnī w-atrawātā d-ḥadārēh, w-qāṭirā ʿit awbel^w l-Qusṭ(anṭīnūpolis) l-mār^ʿ Yūḥannān paṭriyār(kā) bar ʿAbdūn w-l-efisqūṣe, w-b-eksūriya*

Though describing the same events that indeed the Disciple's Vita—the *History of My Lord Saint John*—describes, Michael's summary frames it much more clearly as a persecution carried out by the Chalcedonians as a whole against the Miaphysites as a whole, one group against another. Michael the Syrian in the twelfth century, and probably already his source Ignatios of Melitene in the late eleventh century, has collapsed a complex constellation of motives, agency, and meaning into a simple story of two monolithic groups, oppressor and oppressed.¹⁹¹

Conclusion

Our sources treat doctrinal and ethnic categories as self-evident. To a certain extent this reflected a reality in which specialists, at least, could easily articulate these categories in terms of councils, Christology, and language. But, as we have seen, these theoretical categories did not automatically translate into social groups competing with each other as "blocs."¹⁹² All four narratives reflect a pre-trial situation in which doctrinal categories in particular have not yet been "recognized" as the rightful basis for collective action, social organization, and the distribution of resources and authority. This is true even of the narratives that are most committed to advocating for this "recognition": Alexios's decrees and the Disciple's Vita. By depicting these categories as the rightful criterion, these narratives act as tools for "religio-political entrepreneurship."

As Gyllenhaal has argued, Dagron's narrative of a switch from pragmatism to rigorism is not borne out by the evidence. Melitene's Syrian Jacobite community was flourishing and continued to flourish after John bar 'Abdun's trial, despite occasional bursts of imperial "persecution" or "intolerance."¹⁹³ Their monasteries multiplied,¹⁹⁴ and Melitene was a thriving center

of Syrian Miaphysite culture.¹⁹⁵ The foregoing analysis suggests that we might go a step further and revise the very terms of this debate, exchanging notions like "tolerance" and "pragmatism" (with their implications of laxness and presumptions about what normative framework governed particular historical actors by default, or should have) for terms that allow us to take seriously the possibility that a divergent understanding of doctrinal difference (inflected by social relationships), rather than "pragmatism," led some Byzantine Chalcedonian bishops (like Patriarch Nicholas) and administrators (like the *krites* of Melitene) to reject the formal attempt to label the Jacobite patriarch a heretic. Even by his own account, Patriarch Alexios needed to work hard to convince anyone that the Jacobite patriarch was a heretic. When Alexios in later years decreed that Jacobites in Melitene should not intermarry with Chalcedonians, and should be bound by other legal limitations prescribed against heretics by Justinianic legislation, this is typically seen as a "rigorist" response to a lax practice of "ignoring" those laws, taking Alexios's framing more or less at face value.¹⁹⁶ But the claim that Miaphysites should be subjected to restrictions and limitations under Roman law rested on an *innovative* legal argument.¹⁹⁷ Jacobites and Chalcedonians of Melitene probably did not think they were doing anything illicit or even strange when they intermarried: Christians were marrying Christians, neighbors were marrying neighbors.¹⁹⁸ And when Byzantine administrators appointed to govern did nothing to hinder them in this, they were merely enforcing the legal status quo. The populace of Melitene seems to have required elite ethno-religio-political "entrepreneurs" to "educate" them as to who was a heretic and who was orthodox, to judge from the Greek treatise written in 1026–28

armiw enon d-lā rahme, aykanā da-mḥawyā taš'itā d-'alaw^{hy} d-qadd(išā) mār^y Yūhannān.

191 For a similar, contemporary shift in Armenian historiography, see above, n. 10.

192 Brubaker, "Ethnicity without Groups," 164.

193 Dagron, "Minorités," 188–92; Gyllenhaal, "Byzantine Melitene," 218b–219b, 232.

194 Dagron, "Minorités," 189.

195 J. F. Coakley, "When Were the Five Greek Vowel-Signs Introduced into Syriac Writing?," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 56 (2011): 307–25, at 315–16; Benner, "Die syrisch-jakobitische Kirche," 72–73.

196 Chitwood, "Patriarch Alexios," 298, 300; Chitwood, *Byzantine Legal Culture*, 139–40; Gyllenhaal, "Byzantine Melitene," 229.

197 Chitwood, "Patriarch Alexios," 301–9; Gyllenhaal, "Byzantine Melitene," 226b–227a.

198 Alexios's own decree makes clear that at least some weddings were taking place between parties who may not even have realized (or could plausibly claim not to have realized) that they belonged to different confessions; see above, n. 116. Compare this situation to seventh-century interconfessional marriage discussed by Tannous, *Making*, 98–99.

by Demetrios, bishop of Kyzikos, an ally of Alexios the Stoudite, explaining that the Syrian Jacobites adhered to Miaphysite doctrine, and arguing that this made them heretics.¹⁹⁹ Clearly not everyone found this obvious, not even among elite readers of Greek in Constantinople.

We might be similarly cautious with terms like “persecution,” preferring more precise description. There can be no doubt that the trial of John bar ‘Abdun and its outcome had an impact that went far beyond the handful of individuals directly subjected to pressure to convert, excommunication, and exile. Yet we should be careful to distinguish these symbolic or emotional effects on a community, detrimental as they may be, from widespread violence or imminent threat of violence wielded against a whole category of human beings—a distinction that a term like “persecution” risks eliding. Sometime between 1031 and 1034, arguably just before John bar ‘Abdun passed away, a Syrian scribe living under Byzantine rule read of how God’s chosen people fought for control of the promised land, and was reminded of the trials of his own community. In the margin of the Book of Joshua, he wrote, “Lord have mercy upon your church in the time of Emperor Romanos.”²⁰⁰ This scribe was clearly affected by recent events, but the very manuscript in which his note survives also attests to his own community’s cultural efflorescence under Byzantine rule.²⁰¹

Conceptual clarity allows us to consider individual actors’ personal, social, political, and ideological motives outside of a strictly confessional or ethnic

framework.²⁰² For example, instead of simply adopting the Disciple’s Vita’s portrayal of the Chalcedonian metropolitan of Melitene as a religious “zealot” or “fanatic,”²⁰³ we might ask what circumstances could have led someone in his place to pursue the canon-legal argument that Miaphysite bishops were heretics who should be deposed. Was it the threat to his authority posed by a rival bishop of Melitene ordained by the Jacobite patriarch (a problem at least temporarily solved by that bishop’s capitulation and the synod’s use of the precedent of Cathar capitulators)? Was it the mission of cultivating a distinctly and self-consciously Chalcedonian community locally in Melitene?²⁰⁴ Was it a desire to gain the upper hand in property disputes with wealthy Miaphysite monasteries (of which we have no evidence known to me, but which we can plausibly assume were commonplace by analogy with better documented regions in western Europe)? Was it a wish to gain more access to pious donations by pilgrims and the local elite?²⁰⁵ Most visits to a monastery probably brought a donation.²⁰⁶ Michael of Tanis emphasizes the “love” that “the Jacobite orthodox” and “the people,” even “the Greeks,” felt for John bar ‘Abdun. This affection often prompted donations. In one miracle story, a woman visited the Jacobite patriarch to make a large donation, and grumbled when all the thanks she got was a modest prayer; but she saw her error when John brought out a scale and transcribed the prayer onto a piece of paper to prove that the page miraculously outweighed her bag of coins.²⁰⁷ No lurch toward rigorism

199 See Chitwood, “Patriarch Alexios,” 300–301; Chitwood, *Byzantine Legal Culture*, 140; Gyllenhaal, “Byzantine Melitene,” 220.

200 British Library Add. 7183, fol. 23^v: *māryā etrahham ‘al ‘idīāk b-zabneh d-Romanos malkā*. This note seems to have been written before the same scribe’s notice of John bar ‘Abdun’s death on 3 February 1031, which appears on fol. 60^v in the same manuscript, and was apparently prompted by the event it describes. For both notes, see F. Rosen and J. Forshall, eds., *Catalogus codicum manuscriptorum orientalium qui in Museo Britannico asservantur: Pars prima, codices Syriacos et Carshunicos amplectens* (London, 1838), 66; trans. Coakley, “When Were the Five,” 313, n. 31. The dating by the Byzantine emperor clearly indicates that the scribe lived within Byzantine territory, as concluded by Coakley (p. 316 at n. 43).

201 This manuscript has been adduced as evidence for locating the invention of the five West Syriac vowel signs (based on the Greek alphabet) in and around tenth- and eleventh-century Melitene; Coakley, “When Were the Five,” esp. 313.

202 For a model of how to pursue such an approach, see S. Elm, *Sons of Hellenism, Fathers of the Church: Emperor Julian, Gregory of Nazianzus, and the Vision of Rome* (Berkeley, 2012).

203 Cf. Gautier, “Monodies,” 85.

204 M. Mavroudi, “Licet and Illicit Divination: Empress Zoe and the Icon of Christ Antiphonetes,” in *Les savoirs magiques et leur transmission de l’Antiquité à la Renaissance*, ed. V. Dasen and J.-M. Spieser, *Micrologus’ Library* 60 (Florence, 2014), 431–60, at 434.

205 I thank David R. Thomas for pointing me toward competition over visits from local pilgrims as a possible factor.

206 For donations in Byzantine pilgrimage, see A.-M. Talbot, “Pilgrimage to Healing Shrines: The Evidence of Miracle Accounts,” *DOP* 56 (2002): 153–73, at 162. For pilgrimage sites in Anatolia of regional and local significance, the participation of all levels of society, and monasteries and holy mountains as sites of pilgrimage, see A.-M. Talbot, “Pilgrimage in the Eastern Mediterranean between the 7th and 15th Centuries,” in *Egeria: Mediterranean Medieval Places of Pilgrimage* (Athens, 2008), 37–46, at 43–46.

207 *HPEC* 140–41, trans. 213.

is needed to explain why an ambitious metropolitan bishop might have wished to eliminate such a draw for donations, and to redirect the prestige and revenues of pilgrimage to institutions under his control.

None of this is to claim that doctrine did not matter or was merely instrumental. Quite to the contrary, such an analysis shifts us from a simplistic picture of “two sides,” whose partisanship dwarfs any concern for the specifics of their doctrines, to the possibility of doing justice to the complexity of human social and mental experience, including how human beings have imagined and spoken about God. With theology

liberated from its role as a mere partisan banner, we may ask what about its contents has inspired some to see in it the most compelling basis for social organization and collective action.

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